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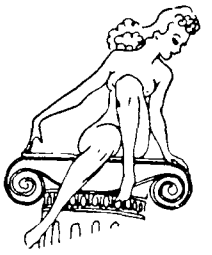

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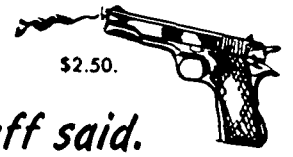

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All Stories Complete

WITCH OF THE ANDES (Short novel—25,000).....by Richard S. Shaver..... 8
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Her body was a masterpiece of beauty, and her mind held all the ancient truths . . .

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Dale Herrick got the piece of string from a stranger—who suddenly vanished! . . .

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He was very different from other men—take his high ears for instance . . .

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WELL, just as we promised you, we're back one month from the day you got your last copy of FA. And right here we want to say that the flood of letters you sent in when we announced that we were going monthly, was heart-warming. You can bet your boots too that from now on we're going to keep an even pace with our big sister magazine, AMAZING STORIES. The first step was to go monthly—and we've done that; the second step, and most important we think, is to give you readers the best and newest ideas in fantasy fiction. We're doing that. Take last month for example with "The Secret of Elena's Tomb." From every indication you readers were very pleased with von Cosel's fact-story. And now this month with Richard Shaver's "Witch of the Andes." We don't have to hide the fact that we're stealing Dick from AS on occasion. As a matter of fact, we're proud of it. And that goes for Rog Phillips too. Perhaps you've already read his great novel, "So Shall Ye Reap," in the August issue of Amazing Stories. If you haven't, then all we've got to say is that you missed a truly great yarn. Of course, when you get right down to it we're not actually stealing the big names from our companion magazine because they're all in the family.

ALL of which brings us up to this month's lead story, "Witch of the Andes," by Dick Shaver. You've heard all about the ancient Titans if you've read any of Shaver's stories before. Well, in this yarn, Dick tells about a Titan woman who was not one of the ancients—she was, in fact, created by modern man. But in her brain lay all the secrets that the ancients so carefully guarded. And when she decided to use some of the knowledge she possessed, things started to happen. Just what we won't say anything more about. But we can promise you some very enjoyable reading, as only Dick Shaver can provide you with. Also, the cover this month was painted around "Witch of the Andes," by Robert Gipson Jones, one of the top-flight artists in the country. Bob really caught the mood of Shaver's story. And as a sort of sneak preview of things to come we'll just say that Jones has a number of other equally fine covers coming up.

BERKELEY LIVINGSTON is back again this month with an unusual novelette concerning a piece of knotted string. According to Berk, life's problems are much like the knots in a piece of string. Some of them are worked out and vanish, and when a new problem arises, a new knot appears. The goal of all men is to get their piece of string entirely "unknotted." But fate has a funny way of stepping in sometimes. And Dale Herrick, the hero of the story, found this to be all too true. It all started with the stranger who showed a piece of knotted string to Dale Herrick. And then, as Herrick took the string, the stranger vanished. . . You can take the story up from there.

GEOFF ST. REYNARD is an all too infrequent contributor to the pages of FA. But he's back this month with a humdinger of a story. It's called, "Mr. Beller and the Winged Horse;" and is about just that—a winged horse. Of course, there's a gentleman known as Mr. Beller who plays an important part too, as a matter of fact, a *very* important part. It seems that Mr. Beller, a beachcomber *par excellence*, was shipwrecked on an uncharted island in the tropics, an island that he knew was impossible to find since it was obviously an optical illusion. Well, anyway, he was on the island in search of a mythical flying horse named Pegasus. But the odd thing was that Pegasus seemed to be in search of Mr. Beller too. So it was inevitable that they should meet. Exactly under what circumstances, and what happened is what makes the story one of the finest of the year. Mr. Beller is a character that we predict you will long remember. Fair enough?

WE'VE got a rather unusual short story this issue, entitled, "The Hesitant Angel." It's author, Larry Sternig, writes about a young man who sees a beautiful girl, falls in love with her, and then suddenly finds that she has vanished. But actually she had never left him, even though he couldn't see her, and at a time when danger threatened him she was there to help him. All this sounds as if the girl were really a guardian angel—and she was, but a very special sort of angel and she guarded him for a very special reason. You'll find out all about it when you read the story which starts on page 108.

H. B. HICKEY is back again this month with a hilarious story called, "Photo Finish." Among other things in this present yarn, you'll meet a pair of shoes that seem to be able to walk

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without any apparent feet in them. As a matter of fact these shoes did things in a very unorthodox manner, and did them so fast that even the lens of a camera found it hard to keep up. The whole thing finally boiled down to a photo finish —where the title of the story comes in, and when you get to that part, you'll know what we mean. Hickey is really clicking these days.

SOME time back we ran a story by a newcomer to the fantasy field, Margaret St. Clair. Remember her short story, "Rocket to Limbo"? Well, since we bought her first fantasy yarn, Miss St. Clair has been doing all right for herself we understand. And we're certainly glad to hear it. Anyway, this month we're presenting a new story by Miss St. Clair, a short yarn entitled, "Whenever the Sun Shines." It's a clever little yarn about a spinster on board a space liner returning from Venus to Earth. Actually, the little old lady doesn't do much in the story, except sit on the passenger deck, knitting and watching people. But the people she watches turn out to be quite interesting, especially one man who it is rumored has in his possession a very valuable crown. There is something quite odd about this man, she decides, after watching him closely during the voyage. But just how odd she never does find out, because—but there we go again, almost spoiling the story for you. We've got a hunch you'll really like this yarn, but then, maybe we're prejudiced because we liked it! Anyway, Miss St. Clair is proving that she can really write top-notch fantasy. And that's what we want!

FINISHING up this issue is our—and your—great new favorite, Rog Phillips. This month Rog writes about a mutant that developed in the human race. Outwardly the young man was no different from any other youth—with the single exception that his ears were set quite high on the sides of his head. This was the only physical distinction between him and the rest of mankind. But inwardly he was vastly different. For he could do things that science today laughed at. Things that science would call sheer fantasy—just as the atom bomb was fantasy until a few short years ago. Now don't get us wrong, we're not saying that there *are* mutants in the world today as Mr. Phillips writes about, but we do say that it is quite conceivable—just as the atom bomb was. Anyway you're in for some first class entertainment, written by a man who has in the space of a few months jumped to the top of your preferred authors list. This new Phillips story, "High Ears," is as thought provoking as his great novel "So Shall Ye Reap" in our big sister magazine, AMAZING STORIES. But you be the judge.

HAVE you readers noticed the rapidly growing interest in fantasy fiction in the world around us? All you have to do is turn on your radio or go to a movie—or even pick up some of the big slick magazines. It's beginning to look as though *Fantastic Adventures* isn't as fantastic as it sounds. And we'd like to say that we're mighty glad to see this current development. It means that the field of fantasy is finding its real place in the world's entertainment. And along those lines, you as readers, and we as editors can sit back and say, "See, I told yuh so!"

ALSO, now that your favorite magazine is monthly, we'd like to say that it will be necessary to run the Reader's Page on a little different schedule. We have to make up each issue a little faster than we had to on our former bi-monthly schedule, so in order to try and keep the Reader's Page as current as possible, we'd like to suggest that you get your letters in as soon as possible. That way we can keep our discussions not more than a month behind the current issue. O.K.?

WHICH brings us up to our "things to come" department. Next month we're bringing you one of your great favorites, Berkeley Livingston, in a novel length story that has the "Livingston" flavor. Which simply means that you'll have all the action, drama, and downright good fantasy that Berk has become noted for. The story is entitled: "The Lamp Of Vengeance," and we won't say a thing more about it now except that you better reserve your copy in advance! . . . And looking ahead a little further, we can't hold the good news back that J. W. Pelkie has come through with another of his popular "Toka" stories. We'll bet you're as pleased as we are with this news. So, be seeing you . . . *Rap.*

"Dis is Too Easy—Makes Me Suspicious."

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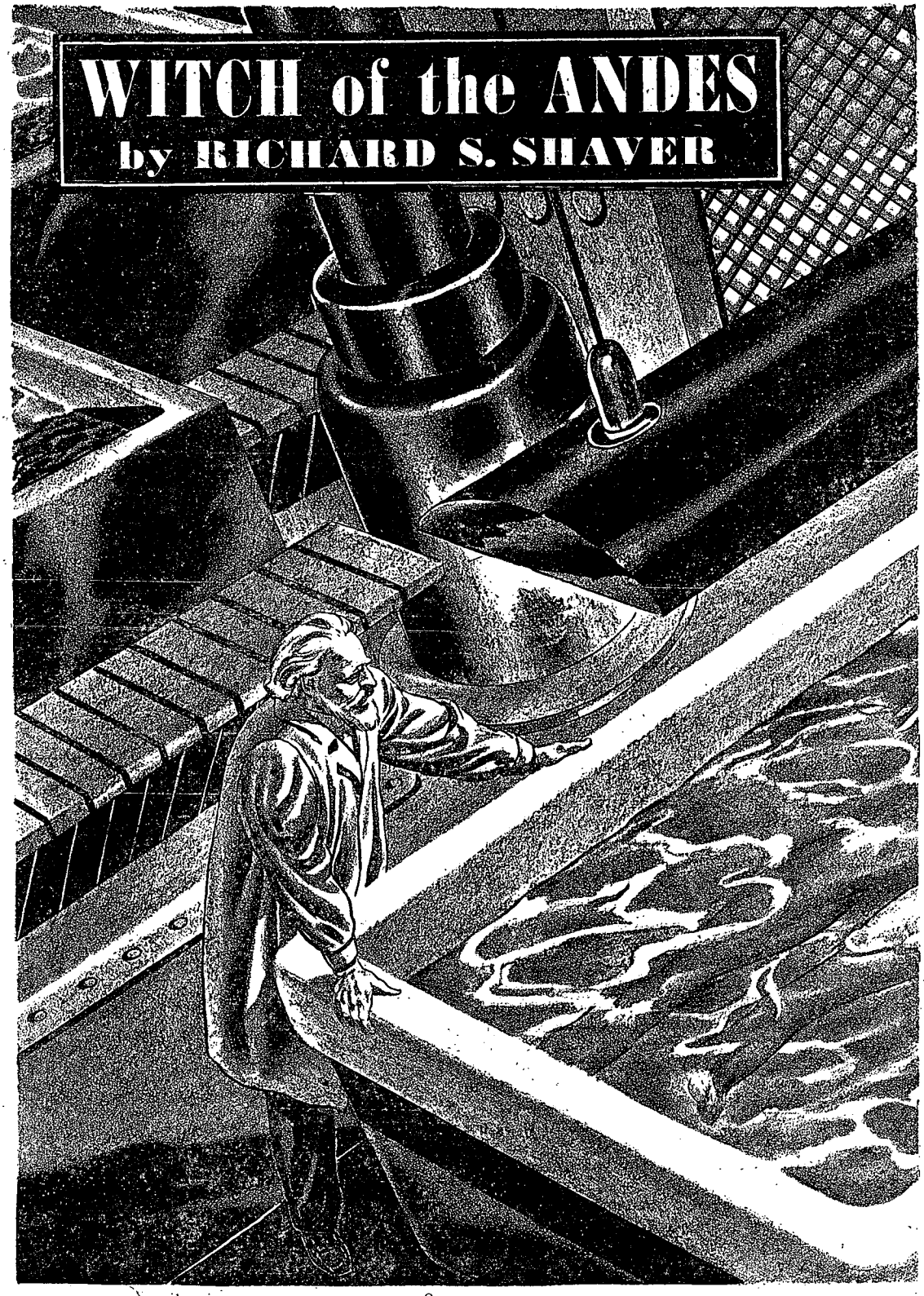

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Where the slumbering earthquake
Lies pillowed on fire,
And the lakes of bitumen
Rise boilingly higher;
Where the roots of the Andes
Strike deep in the earth . . .

(Byron's, Manfred)

* * *

CHAPTER I

PUG RANSCOM looked at her dad reproachfully. So did I. Her dad's face went from red to ruby and back again. He was about as near embarrassed as possible for him. The cigar smoke made the usual gray ribbons in front of his face, and his big teeth champed the butt. I had a pretty good idea Pug was not going to get her way this time.

"It's up in the headwaters of the Rio Chigauri, Steve. I haven't got another man to send, or I wouldn't even think of asking you. But something is wrong up there, and somebody has to at least make an appearance. All I want is an idea, a kind of advance report, something for us to go on. Drop in, talk it over with anyone you can find who seems to know anything, show yourself around and tell who you are. The main idea is to satisfy those people that something is being done for them. We'll get around to the real work later. Just a preliminary report; come right back and the marriage will go through as scheduled . . ."

Pug let out an anguished snort. "Dad, you can't do this to your only child! Steve and I have postponed that wedding twice already, and we're just not going to do it again! If you don't want us to get married, say so, and we'll start out looking for jobs where people act like human beings. A job where we can depend on having the same address for two weeks in succession."

"Honest, Steve," the chief wasn't paying any attention to Pug, so I knew she was overruled already, "it just can't be helped. You've got a week, and you can do it in four days. Just drop in by plane, talk it over, and come right back. You're the only available man."

"Tell me about it." I didn't look at Pug, I didn't have the heart. I knew I had to go, I couldn't risk losing my job right now, of all times. Maybe the old man *did* have to ask me.

"The natives are fleeing the whole valley of the Chigauri, and there are a lot of Americans living there, ranches, oil wells, mining companies. A lot of American money tied up in investments, and they are raising hell because the native labor is running away. The letters sound scared. I won't show 'em to you, I want to get your first impressions on the spot. These people might be lying to get someone to come. I've got an address of one Professor Nebski who is said to be at the bottom of the trouble, or else knows what it's about. You look him up, find out what the trouble really is, and come back here. I'll do the rest. I'll have some men by that time."

"By *next year* you *ought* to have some men! Dad, you can't get away with this! Sending my man off every time we get a wedding date set. I'll fix you, Dad! You'll be sorry."

"Honest, Pug, I can't help it. He's the only man I've got left. I've been doing my best to keep him here, but someone just has to be sent, it's an order. I have to obey orders too, you know."

HECK of a name for a girl, "Pug." But she did have a nose, and it did look like that, and the name had

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stuck. And I loved her, and we would be married next week if her Dad, Chief of the FBI, the South American part of it anyway, wasn't trying to get me killed off so she would have a chance to land someone with more future than a Government leg-man.

I hugged Pug close and kissed a few of the tears away, standing there with the motors of the Clipper warming up behind me.

"Listen, tomboy, you keep your nose clean and everything will come off according to schedule. We're not going to let a little thing like a mass-migration, or whatever this is, get in our way. I get off the plane, see, ask two questions and get on the next one back. This is one job that's going to get very slight attention."

"Yes, I know. That's what you *say*. But just remember this, Steve Hawley. If you don't get back here on time, someone is liable to lead me to that altar before you do! And that's final. You don't have to let Dad push you around the way he does. He's taking an unfair advantage . . ."

"Sure. Sure, carrot-top. And it's going to be too bad if someone does 'lead you to the altar,' because I'll work him over till you won't be able to use him for anything but hamburger steak! So don't get that idea . . ."

I got into the Clipper. Pug waved, turned away very droopily. I didn't blame her. It looked very much to me as though her father did oppose our marriage, and I couldn't much blame him. There are better men than me, at that. And he loved her, a lot more than was good for her. But it wasn't going to do him any good.

* * *

The pilot of the plane I had chartered in Rio set her down easily on the little flying field. I said—"So that's Professor Nebski's place. Can you tell me anything about him?"

"Nobody knows too much about him. He's a mystery man, if you ask me. Has lots of money, had that flying field built just to get supplies for his laboratory flown in. I don't believe he has any other visitors. I wouldn't have known where it was, except the company made several deliveries here, and he's on our books. I never even saw him . . ."

"O.K. Wait for me. This isn't going to take long."

But the Professor was *very* talkative. He had started off when I asked him what was wrong up here . . . and was still going!

"There are two paths for the mind to follow. One leads to ecstasy, to wish-fulfillment, to happiness. But it is the happiness of illusion, a morass of madness obscured by pretty flowers."

"Now, listen to me, Professor. I didn't come here to find out whether the world was crazy or not. Just to find out what's going on around here that makes all the trouble."

The Prof. went right on as if I hadn't said a word. "The other path, much spoken of but little understood, is perhaps rocky, but it is firm."

I said, "Huh?"

"The first steps," his voice went on, "down each of these paths are different, but only subtly so. It is very easy to make the first mistake, and to choose the path to madness."

"What's madness got to do with . . ."

"To my mind, Mr. Hawley, the whole world of man, our so-called 'modern' world of erudition, of pragmatic engineering, of mechanical virtuosity, of productive muchness . . , is on the first, the easy path! Is so far along the path that to one on the

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true path, the world of man is mad."

"So far as I'm concerned it can *be* crazy!" I muttered.

"What did you come here into this wilderness for, then?"

"I came here to learn what was going on that shouldn't and to tell it to stop! You know darn well that when all the workmen leave their jobs and run off, the people who own things start yelling their heads off. And somebody like me has to run half around the world to tend to whatever they should have tended to and didn't."

THE little, stocky Prof. waggled his grey head at me a little doubtfully.

"I can tell you what is going on well enough. But I don't think you will be able to do much about it. Nor anyone else . . ."

"Well, I don't intend to, either. I just have to learn something to give the head office an idea what is wrong here."

The old Prof. looked mournful. "Such a good-looking young man, it seems a shame . . ." He waggled his fuzzy grey head some more. I looked about at the neat white walls of his big laboratory, at the purring dynamos, bubbling vats of strange fluids, at the endless intricacies of coiled glass tubes and all the mystery of modern necromancy . . .

"What's a shame?" I asked.

"A shame they should send you here. For what you may learn if I am honest with you may be too much for your modern intelligence to bear. I have told you the world is mad. You are a part of that world. Now, all mad people are set on a queer kind of hair-trigger, mentally. The least genuine shock to their equilibrium sets them off into downright lunacy. That's why I say it's a shame. If I am honest with you, you will probably go insane. If I am dishonest with you, you have wasted your trip . . ."

"I won't go loony. If that was possible it would have happened long ago. But I may think you're not all there if you don't give me some idea what you are talking about."

"Perhaps you had better let me see the notes on the reports that brought you here. It may be that what I am thinking of has nothing to do with this case."

"The Chief wouldn't tell me a thing, back home. But here is the letter they gave me in the Rio de Janeiro office, from the ranchers here on the Rio Chigauri."

The old man took the letter, read it aloud.

"SAFBI

Dear sirs:

All natives are fleeing the valley of the Chigauri. Planters, mines, oil wells, everything is shut down for lack of labor. Queries to fleeing people bring only wild answers, the usual stories mixed with some new ones. They see giant footprints, which is an old tale about here, but now they see a gigantic female who warns them in a giant voice to flee before death comes upon them. They also say they see nightmare creatures, winged men, crawling monsters with men's legs . . . a host of fearful things. These tales are not all false or they would not cause complete evacuation of the whole area.

It could well be an attempt to hide a new gold strike, or some similar hoax.

Something very strange is undoubtedly going on, and it is expensive. Please do something, or all our work to make this area profitable will revert to the jungle.

Sincerely
Ramon Nolanoras
Henry Jennings
John Frank Neilsen"

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The Prof. handed the letter back to me with a twinkle in his eye. "That's all you know of this?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Hawley, I can show you what it is that has frightened the superstitious natives. But what you expect to do about it, I can't imagine."

He pulled back the drapes from the long square-paneled windows which formed one whole wall of the laboratory. It was a marvellous stretch of scenery—only the Andes can furnish that kind of natural grandeur. A bit of cliff, a long plume of falls, a stream cascading from the heights, the great flowered trees of the tropics, mangoes, camphor-wood . . . and under that plume of wind-blown water a gigantic female figure! A moving figure! From here, distant as it was, it seemed a maiden, almost a child, taking a bath. A gigantic child, a child of some race three times the size of man! I gasped, rubbed my eyes. Either they didn't focus or she was the biggest human on earth . . . or the Prof. was playing tricks on me.

"I never saw it! It is not true!"

"Which is what I meant by saying your world is mad. They can never face a truth if it is a big, important truth. Consequently their whole mental set-up is composed of truths half-seen, half-accepted. A kind of mad illogic is the sad result."

"You mean there really is a giantess out there using the river as a shower-bath?"

"Yes, and I am responsible for her being there. She is my daughter, in a manner of speaking. Or rather, I created her as an experiment. One that was a bit more successful than I ever expected, it is true."

"How am I supposed to explain that to the office. They'd fire me for drinking, or worse . . ."

"However that may be, I had better explain it to you, so that the perilous equilibrium so falsely fostered within your fragile sanity by your poverty stricken educational system may be preserved."

"YES, you had better. It's fragile, I will admit, after that sight. And it is precious to me, such as it is!"

"Listen closely then. The body of man can be considered as a series of cells of separate natures whose symbiotic relations are a result of long ages of interaction between their many once divergent life-forms . . ."

"Just a minute, Professor Nebski. If you can put me up tonight, I'll tell that plane to drop back tomorrow to pick me up."

"Of course. It will take some time to explain things thoroughly . . ."

"You said a mouthful, fuzztop," I muttered, as I went out to release the plane. It was going to take time for me to understand how that giant female came to be here, all right. It was going to take plenty of time to figure out what the Prof. was talking about. If my ears and eyes were working, I had stumbled into the biggest thing of my career.

When I returned, the Professor asked mildly, "Shall I proceed?"

I nodded. I wanted to hear it all before I decided what was what . . .

"I have made a study of life and the cells that co-operate to make what we call life forms. Long ago I worked out a perfusion solution which took the place of all nutrients manufactured by the normal body of the natural animal. I immersed flesh cells in this perfusion solution much after the Alexis Carrel methods, though my own are different in detail. After a time my cells began to become, as it were, symbiotic with the nutrient. They lost their

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methods of working together to manufacture nutrients, started out in a new way of life."

The old Prof. sat down, made himself comfy, and lit a pipe. He looked at me cannily to see if I was following. I registered intelligent interest, and he went on:

"The result was a way of separating flesh into individual cells, very different in nature from each other. The components of the organisms of flesh, the cells which make up the various organs of the body, separated into races of cells, new forms of life, in truth. What I had, after coaxing them to live apart from each other by a magnetic separator I invented—was a mass of jelly containing many diverse forms of life entirely new on this old earth. Or was it the beginning again, the start of life's cycle?"

"Don't ask me, Dr. Nebski, tell me!"

"There is a substance called 'aspartic acid' which speeds up the specialization during growth—of cells. I began to experiment with putting aspartic acid into this mass of living jelly. I learned a great deal. After a time, I had several such substances, amino acids, nucleic acids, enzymes, a host of compounds which affected the growth and nature and organization of cells. And I went even farther . . ."

"Yes, I begin to see a glimmer!" I did too, but was it possible I was right?

"I learned the ancient original method by which life evolved into what it is. Into my mass of jelly I learned to put just those substances needed to develop the specialized groupings we called 'life' for want of a better name. I *learned to cause to develop exactly any form of life* I pleased!"

"Impossible!"

"Of course it is impossible! It is quite a mad undertaking, according to orthodox science and accepted beliefs. But it is nevertheless *true* that *I can take a mass of disorganized protoplasm,* and *it will retain enough of its original organizational instincts to develop again into a living creature.* And the nature of that creature *I can predetermine* by the mixture of determining compounds I put into it!"

"Does all this you are telling me have some relation to that 'illusion' on your window pane?"

"That 'illusion on my window pane' is the result of an experiment of mine which took on unexpected powers of growth. Since I could hardly kill her, once I created her . . . I turned her loose! Loose with a number of other creatures I created. They have made themselves an interesting little world of their own! Would you like to enter that world?"

"I DON'T know. First I would like to see visible proof that what you say is true. I would like to see this experiment in producing life itself . . . I can hardly accept what you, without evidence . . ."

"Very well. Though I can't see what earthly good it can do you. Which is another reason I say your world is mad. The most wonderful things are possible to a sane mind—and to men of your 'civilized' world they are impossible dreams."

"Here," we had walked across the big lab to a series of vats set in the concrete floor, "here is some of my disorganized protoplasm in the process of becoming what I call prime cells. You can see there the parts of the carcase not yet wholly disorganized."

Within the vat were portions of the carcase of a pig; the snout and eyes, the ears, were very plain. Most of the rest was formless pink jelly. About it bubbled a greenish liquid, which was

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pumped in and out of the vat by a series of glass tubes and pumps, connected with a complicated set-up of aerators, of coolers and heaters, of wires and little throbbing pumps that sounded like several hearts beating loudly.

In the next vat was the carcase of a deer, still half alive, feebly kicking its legs. In another a small alligator lay and looked at me unblinkingly, reptilian snout thrust above the surface and very much alive, although most of its legs and tail had been absorbed by the dis-associating powers of the fluid.

"You can see here," the Professor said, "how I have placed the alligator in there alive, turned on the magnetic dis-sociator, started the perfusing pump, sealed off the air and turned on the oxygen. He will soon be absorbed into the fluid wholly. Every cell in his body, still alive and healthy, will have lost all necessity of co-operating with the other cells and quietly cut itself loose from a partnership it no longer needs!"

"I see some animals dissolving in what could well be an acid bath."

"Very well. I will now drain off the fluid from this half-dissolved saurian. You can see that he is only half present. There is nothing else in this fluid but nutrients I synthesized and placed there. I drain off the fluid with this syphon into my 'life' tank, here. Now I pour in these three determing mixtures, one is di-methionine, one aspartic acid, one a mixture of enzymes and chemicals, known only to myself, they are nameless. Watch! Watch closely!"

Within the tank the green fluid began to move in strange little purposeful patterns as if possessed suddenly of a will or wills of its own. Now the professor wheeled out a weird device. It was a complicated, large projector, and threw a beam of light into the green fluid. The projector made the picture of a little man in the tank. A little man about two feet long, and on his back were wings!

"The projector is not an ordinary one. It throws a beam which has magnetic properties. The cells assemble along the force lines of the pattern. By this means my creations have form. . ."

I WATCHED closely, all right. He wasn't going to pull a fast one on me. I was here to discover a faker who was frightening the whole population of a valuable section of land away. If it was the Prof. I meant to find out!

"So we see, that *by using means and formulas and methods well known to modern science*, but assembled together under a mind and with a purpose *different* from those which gave rise to these methods and formulas, we have something unbelievable to your sane modern world. We have the *means of creating life itself*, and by that means, the path to a Utopia which your educated people only dream of—never think to work toward with their two hands. I am a God, and *I can create life anew* . . !

The green and pink streaks of the fluid in the tank were acting very strangely. They were collecting around the lines of the projected picture. In the little pictured breast a heart began to beat, a little red pumping organ that grew swiftly. Veins and arteries appeared, branched out along the grey-green limbs, and the pink blood began to flow along the vessels. An hour crept by as I watched the intense activity within the bath of nutrient and coruscating magnetic flows from the little projector. I watched, believe me! I wanted to catch this trickster. It would make everything simple if I could make sure he was fooling me for a purpose. . . To send me away with a lot of nonsense in my head!

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But if this was nonsense or bamboozlement he had me hypnotized!

For within the tank a little pixie of a man was almost fully formed! The Doc shut off the pumps. For a time the little fellow just lay, looking up dreamily. Then, as if he wanted to see what was going on, he stood up, put one leg to the side of the tank, and jumped out.

"He won't learn to talk for several days. But he is already smart, like an adult in some ways. Or a puppy. The stimulated, speeded-up growth makes their learning period extremely short. As the cells adapt to the necessity of manufacturing their own fluids in the blood stream, to assimilating the food eaten, to doing all the required work of living and maintaining life in the other organs, the other collections of symbiotic cells. . . His learning and his adaptation slows down, he becomes more nearly what we call adult. What you have seen is *really a speeded-up birth process,* slightly different in detail, but in the main *quite the same as normal birth in the mother's womb!*"

I only looked, with my mouth open. "You went nature one better, and did it faster. You're just a mother. . .".

He looked at me to see if I was mocking. I wasn't, not at all. That little pixie he had created was looking us over with all too knowing an eye. Sharp as a Fifth Avenue shyster, that eye, but somehow amused at us.

"I'm ready. Now show me the place where you keep the rest of your productions, and I'll be ready to wire in my resignation!"

"Would you do that?" he asked eagerly. "Would you stay here and help me with my brave little new world? We need understanding people like yourself, for our contacts with the civilized world, and even with the primitive world just beyond these mountains, have not been happy. It is that misunderstanding that brought you here."

"Yes, yes, I know. Show me the rest, you've gone this far. I don't believe it, but since it's in front of my eyes I can't deny it, can I?"

"Perhaps my best can persuade you. We will go and see her."

"The big girl I saw in the waterfall?"

"Yes. I cannot explain all the details of her creation. *These* are sort of mass-production articles. But *she,* she was my work of art, my best and most successful synthetization!"

I thought of Pug, and my promise to return at once. Ruthlessly I thrust the thought away. This thing, whatever it was, demanded everything I had to give it. But my heart was heavy as I followed the old man, for I knew I did not intend to return until I knew everything my brain could learn of the place, the man and his work.

CHAPTER II

"Aurore"

"The blush of earth embracing with her heaven,—
Tinge thy celestial aspect, and make tame
The beauties of the sunbow which bends o'er thee.
Beautiful Spirit! in thy calm clear brow, . . .
(Manfred to Witch of the Alps)
Byron, "Manfred"

"IN YEARS she is but a child. But the tremendous growth my then inspired work imparted to her has given her a power of mind such as exists in no other on earth. She is a superior being! In no other creature of my creation have I been able to produce the same mental activity. It was an extremely fortunate accident . . . Some

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ingredient very needed but which I did not know about and have not yet learned. I may never know why she is so superior mentally."

I had followed him through the laboratory and along a path toward the distant waterfall. The gigantic maiden I had seen bathing was no longer in evidence. But other unbelievable living things were. . .

Like the little man whom he had created before my eyes, for instance. He followed us now, playfully skipping, childlike, about our feet. Upon his back the tiny prismatic wings fluttered. At times he would wave them furiously and leave the ground. They seemed to be growing steadily larger. But he spoke no words, only gurgling like a very young baby.

It was his innocent skipping that brought the sudden tragedy!

As we passed along the trail, the little dancing homunculi saw something in the brush that fascinated him, flitted into the air, and landed with both feet on a crawling thing that hissed loudly and angrily. I dashed forward, pulling my gun from the holster, for I wished to protect the child-like new-born innocent from what I guessed was a dangerous reptile. The old Professor followed me, and as I poked about looking for the snake, he suddenly gave a cry, clapped a hand to his leg at the knee, and after a moment of facial contortion, collapsed on the ground. I turned back to him, and through the grass saw the huge body of a ten-foot reptile gliding swiftly away. I blasted at it with the pistol, and was rewarded in seeing it die. Bending over the reptilian's writhing body, I was aware at once that the Professor was doomed! For it was an enormous Trigonocephalus Atrox, a relative of the well known fer de lance, and very deadly. In such a size its bite was sure death. I lifted the now unconscious old man to carry him back to the laboratory. The little winged imp he had created skipped blithely ahead, all unconscious of the tragedy he had caused.

Back in the lab I searched frantically through the old man's belongings for the snake serum kit I knew every dweller in these jungles must possess. Finding it, I administered the anti-venom injection. But the old man never came out of his swoon. It was too late!

Night was falling when I finally left his body, and took that trail along which we had started. It seemed to me I must acquaint his "daughter" with what had happened.

Certainly I could not leave with the mystery only half solved, with only a dead man's word to tell of what had been going on here in the isolation.

The little "man" was a sober child now, walking gravely ahead of me, and glancing back as if he half understood what had happened now.

The worn pathway came out of the shadow of the great trees on the brink of a swirling pool, that pool into which tumbled the tall cascade from the face of the cliff.

In the soft gravelly mud of the pool's bank, before me, was the gigantic foot-print! The same foot-print I had been told was described again and again in letters from this area. A foot-print that only a titan could leave on earth! Pressed deep by the great weight, it was all of two feet long!

Fearfully, unbelievingly, I looked about for the author of the depression. Yes, I believed that what I had seen in the Professor's window this afternoon had been a true sight, and no trick. No one had faked that foot-print. And no one had faked the gigantic, lovely form that now came swimming across the pool toward me!

Her long wet hair clothing her in a

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glory which the setting sun illuminated glowingly, she stood half out of the water, watching me gravely for a moment.

Then she asked in a voice not unpleasant but huge in volume: "Where is my father?"

I DID not know how to tell her. I feared she would suspect me of collusion in his death, yet she must be told. Impossible as the thing was in retrospect, there she stood imposed upon reality with a greater, more intense energy-of-being than the dull, staid fragments of life, trees, myself, the rocks about her!

I blurted it out at last—"He was killed by a snake as he led me to you. I have come to tell you. I will help all I can. I am ignorant of much that would be useful in this your trouble, but I am willing and anxious to help you if I can."

Tears sprang into her eyes, she stood for a moment, then with a strange bird-like cry, shrill and penetrating, she plunged back into the water and swam away. On the farther shore there gathered to her call a company of little men exactly like the newly created one standing beside me, and as she strode, dripping, from the water these followed her in a troop into the forest gloom. Night was nearly upon me, I could not wait here. I turned back to the shelter of the old man's retreat, his laboratory built here away from the prying eyes of all men, that had proved to be his chamber of creation, the *cradle of a new race of beings!*

I spent a pretty poor night, with a dead man in the next room, and God knows what was going on around in the jungle outside. "A brave new world" the Prof. had called it. I hoped sincerely he was right! If he was wrong and those "people" of his were thinking I killed the old man, I was going to be in for it. I was completely at their mercy.

But morning came, and nothing had happened to disturb the silence within the big laboratory. Or lessen the feeling of gloom and the presence of death.

With the sun came a little man, half walking, half flying. He opened the door and walked in familiarly, but his face was sad. He said in very good English:

"I have come to prepare the Father for the burial. You will help me?"

I answered as well as I could, "Of course I will help you. Will it be a cremation at once, or must we embalm the body?"

"It will be neither. You are to help me transform the body into life of another kind. His mind cells are not to be lost."

"Mind cells die in twelve minutes! You can't save a dead man. . . ."

"You are incorrect. But there is no need for us to argue. There is a need for you to obey, for the Superior One has ordered this."

THAT little fellow knew what he was doing and he was going to do it. I realized he was conscious of having a power over me, that I must obey or something would happen to me. I wondered what the something was—but I obeyed him. I lifted the dead man's body into the vats, helped him turn the big valves, helped him do all the strange things with that body which seemed to be required. And when we got through, there was rising out of the vat a creature neither man nor animal, neither alive nor dead—but an infant of a new kind! I only hoped that the big body of baby-pink flesh would soon acquire again the old Professor's wits. Certainly it was weird to see him without any more sense than a puling new-

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born child. . . .

"The lack of wit is due to the fact that he was dead too long. The mental power returns after growth has set in." The little man was very serious. He seemed to know my thoughts.

"Will he be Professor Nebski then?" I asked anxiously, for I knew very well there was no genius of his skill in this field of flesh-perfusion with an iota of his success.

"No, he will be one of us, the New Race. It is too bad. The character of the person we knew as the Father has gone forever. But his flesh lives on, and something of his experience will arise again by hereditary determination within the cells. . . .

"Now come with me. The Superior One has decided that this place must be abandoned. We will take what we need, the building is to burn."

The big new creature that had been Professor Nebski stumbled after us out of his laboratory, like a baby learning to walk. As we left, I saw a file of the little men entering the laboratory, and presently they began to pass us on the trail, loaded down with apparatus. We were forced to travel slowly for need of caring for the uncertain steps of the child-like man who walked between us.

"Why are they going to burn the laboratory?" I asked the little fellow.

"The outer world would investigate the Professor's death. The fire will explain it. We do not want our new world discovered by any people from your world."

I could understand. It was beautiful here, and these creatures, after all, were just not acceptable to modern men. But I was accepting them. . .

And my ears were burning, as I thought of the burning phrases with which Pug Ranscom must be describing me to her bosom friends. Today was to have been our wedding day.

And when that aviator came for me, found the place burned, he would report me dead. . .

Pug *would* marry another man, then!

The stream which caused the falls where I had seen the unbelievable figure of the giant girl was the boundary of "The New World." We crossed it where it shoaled into rapids below the big pool of the falls, and when I stepped out of the shallow water I realized I had entered a place on earth unlike any other. Something here had changed the normal order of life. I looked back to see the long low building of the "Father" burning. I wished they hadn't been in such a hurry. I could have gotten immensely valuable data from the old Professor's notes. Especially I would like to know just what he had done to the soil and the trees here on the far side of the stream. What made this difference. . .?

How strange the sudden park-like peace and order! The quiet, the lack of insect stridulence, the muted harmonizing songs of birds, birds singing together as if trained to do so by some spirit! The strange, alien *new* forms of plants, the flowers on trees I had never seen bear flowers before. The well-kept paths that angled and intersected the shaded distance. Along these paths ran two streams of little winged people, one toward the stream and one going into the darker depths of the forest. The latter bore loads of things I recognized as the lab. equipment and furnishings. Perhaps the old wizard's notes were still available if I was lucky. That caravan didn't appear to have left a thing, there was so much of it.

She lay on a flower strewn rock in a grotto, a kind of natural amphitheatre, with the open side of the grotto a big grassy hollow. It was hot in the hollow, but among the small shrubs and pools of the little valley hundreds of the small

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winged men and women played or worked or just sat, looking at her.

SHE was sad, and with her eyes half closed, lay relaxed, stretched out in her unearthly beauty like a dreaming goddess. We stood with that big pink naked body of the reborn professor between us, waiting for a look, a word from her. After a long moment it came. Hers was a big voice, but very musical and controlled, a voice that told of a world of mental activity within her.

"So the old place is gone, and my father is gone, and all things begin anew! I am sad to lose him. Stranger, I do not like you! You bring ill luck, and sad events follow in your wake. Why have you not run away, now that you have allowed my father to die?"

I was taken aback. It had occurred to me she would hold the old man's death against me, but it was only natural. I said:

"A big fer-de-lance bit him. I killed the snake. When I gave him the serum it was too late. He wanted me to see your new world. He showed me his method of making new life from old. I was interested, wanted to see the results of his work here in their own environment. The old man offered tentatively to keep me here as a helper—he said he had a need for people like myself. Why should you dislike me?"

"Do you understand his work, stranger?"

"Vaguely. There are scientists in the outside world who do similar work. But it has not progressed so far; they have not had your father's success."

"I am carrying on his plans. I will teach his new self, here, all that the old self knew. I will make him like himself again. If he wanted you to help here, you will stay. I will see to that."

Her voice was peremptory, there was a spoiled child petulance to it, but I realized the old man's death must have hurt her.

"Do you think it was wise to burn his laboratory, then?"

"Yes, it was wise. It will mislead inquiring people like yourself. We have driven the people away from the whole valley of the Chigauri. We will make it our own. We are growing, and we will grow more and more."

"I think your attitude of antagonism toward people like myself is wrong. Why should you want to drive people away?"

The big, sea-blue eyes fixed me a little scornfully. "Once you see what our plans tend toward, you will understand that."

"You say *we*. Who do you mean by 'we.' Are there others here besides you?"

"The little people you see around you are 'we'. I am their leader. My creation accidentally gave me better brains. But they have fine minds, too. Better than *people* like you!" Her voice was definitely disparaging of "people" like myself. I could not fathom why she considered herself so apart from the world, an enemy of normal life. I wish I had understood sooner . . . before. . .

I LIVED there for some days before the truth began to penetrate. The little winged people brought food, fruit, iguana meat, the milk-like sap of a tree, water from the springs. I wandered through the well-kept little valley. The beautiful days passed easily. A week went by, and I was frantic.

Up to now the girl had not taken me into her confidence. She had not shown me where the tools and effects from the burned laboratory had been taken. I knew there must be a big home or hidden work-shop somewhere, because she was out of sight so much of the time.

She would come striding back, top-

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ping the lower trees with her size, looking as beautiful as a dream. But her eyes were preoccupied, and up to now I had not even heard her name. The little people called her "The Superior One," but they avoided me and I had little chance to learn anything. But I knew I was on probation. Sooner or later this would change. Then I could at least go back with some report that would tell whether the trouble was over or would get worse, and just what the trouble was. I couldn't figure why she wanted to drive people away?

I found out. One morning when she strode away from the grotto where she slept sometimes, away from the little park-like hollow where I had been patiently waiting to be noticed and informed, I decided to follow her. The little people went about their work and paid no attention, anyway. That work was growing things, cultivating many series of what I realized must be experimental plants, building their houses in their tiny city on the side of the hill . . . and being very quiet when I was around. I followed her big footprints in the earth, into the deeper forest, over the low hill, across a brook and a valley, over another, higher hill; miles I trudged through the increasingly wild landscape. The signs of cultivation had long ceased, and the sun was nearing zenith when I looked down and saw what all the scenery was about.

What I saw was the head of a long, long valley, stretching down and down as far as eye could reach. It must have been the headwaters of the Chigauri river. The stream came out of a cavern mouth, and that mountain over the cavern mouth was the head of the valley. Alongside the stream, right at the opening in the cliffy side of the mountain, had been built a very long low structure. It was built higgledy piggledy of the native stone about, and many plants had been planted in the rocks. A few weeks' more growth and it would be invisible except as a long mound of earth.

Up to one end of this mound structure a stream of supplies was being brought. The little people had beasts of burden and carts here, and they were not the same little people. You know how the work of two artists differs? Such was the difference. These I saw plainly were the work of another person. I figured that those who lived by the side of the other stream were the creation of old Professor Nebski. These, these were Aurore's, the big girl's work. I wondered just what creature's flesh the Prof had used to make the basic cell-plasmic fluid from which he had "reorganized" her "symbiotes."

The supplies they were carting up consisted of plants, living and dried, and of cages in which were growing and squealing animals. I surmised there was a pretty busy party of little trappers and hunters back in the forests of those mountains.

FROM the other end of the low structure, at intervals, would stumble out one of the pink, hairless, baby things. I crept closer. I wanted to know just *what* she was making, what sort of mind Aurore had that the Professor had created. I knew that what she was making would tell me what she was inside her mind. Was she human, or a monstrous thing which must automatically be opposed to humanity? Was the Professor wrong in his estimate of his creation, had he created an intelligent, beautiful Frankenstein? Were those creations which stumbled so frequently from that long house of mystery designed to make a greater future for man—or provide a rival which would displace man?

I lay all that afternoon in the hiding of the low growing shrubs about the

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concealed door, watching the creatures. Still I did not know! They were of many kinds, startling variants from the norm of growth sometimes, and each one that came out was different—a new Adam or a new Eve whose baby-blind eyes stared up at the sun and blinked shut in pain.

The sun was an hour above the horizon when I began to make a stealthy retreat from my hiding place. I was just slipping over the brow of the low hill above the house of creation when I heard a great voice calling my name:

"Steve Hawley! Come back here!"

I scrambled on, too startled to stop at first. Then I heard the giant girl's feet thudding on the earth behind and knew that flight was not only silly but hopeless. She had seen me against the sky. I turned back. She loomed above me, a titaness, her face flushed and angry.

"You have taken to spying on me. I knew such as you were not to be trusted!"

I managed a silly kind of grin, said, "Well, you ignored me, and my curiosity got the better of me. I followed your footprints."

"Now that you are here, you may as well see it all, and know what my plans are. Then you must decide whether to join us or go back to your way of life. But that is exactly the trouble! If people knew, there are those who would stop this work. How can I trust you if I let you go?"

"That is why you have ignored me?"

"Of course. I am a woman, and I fear to trust my own judgment in your case. Emotion should have nothing to do with it."

It was my first intimation that she had a human heart beating within that great woman-breast of her. I smiled. She was facing a problem that was as old as time.

"Thanks. I didn't know you had any emotions."

"My emotions do not rule my thought. Take care you remember that."

"What does rule your thought, oh beautiful giantess?"

"Not flattery, either. The wishes, the plans, the dreams of my father, that old man you permitted to be killed, the inner heart of him as he told it to me in the years I have been his lone friend and confidant. For all the years of my life there has been no one but he and I and his creations. He taught me his greatest art, the secret of life itself. I mean to see that something worthwhile comes of his discoveries."

THE light of idealism was in her eye but, doubting, I wondered if it were not a fanaticism, a blundering kind of untutored mimicry of the old man's fine mind. . . I asked, "Listen, I do not know you well, and in years you may be a child, in growth a giantess, and in mind a super-woman. But I am not sure of anything about you. But you can be sure of one thing, I am not an enemy to you, unless you mean evil to mankind."

There was an eerie sensation I experienced always when talking to her, like talking to some spirit summoned from the unknown, something inhuman and grim about her mind that I sensed, but could not put a finger on. I resolved to be as canny as I knew how, to learn all I could, to try to direct this tremendous force of life that was in her as nearly in a benevolent direction as I might. But could I?

Talking, we had returned to the long mound-like building. We went in the great door, she stooping low. I wanted to ask her just what the creatures I had seen released to wander away down that tumbling stream's banks meant to her,

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what they would become, but I did not want to press her. In good time she would reveal more to me if I did not show too eager an interest.

The building was a repetition of the strange laboratory of the old man upon a vastly greater scale. Vat after vat bubbled and seethed with the living green and yellow and red fluids; alligators of huge size lay side by side with jaguars and deer in the absorbing, cell-separating liquids. Pipes and tubing and pumps breathed and hissed and gurgled with activity, and here and there stood the little winged men watching the vats, turning the valves on or off, dropping in various ingredients from big vials of many strange labels. I could not follow all of it as we went through, my knowledge of what was possible was yet too elementary to grasp what she might be doing.

"I have decided to enlarge the first experimental program of the father just as greatly as I am able, so as quickly to get results that a smaller scale of work would take many years to produce." She was talking almost absently, as though her inner mind were reluctant, while her ruling mind had decided that I might as well be told all, since there was no help for it now.

"What was Professor Nebski's experimental plan?"

"He was trying to produce the perfect man. It was his theory that man had been harmed by the centuries of accidental environment, and that much of that harm could be overcome by his method of creation. He produced these small winged creatures rather slowly, trying each time to make a better, more intelligent being than man, natural man like you, could ever hope to be. I was an accidental success in his first experiments. He has often told me that he was trying to make a little race of men that did not take up much room, who were superior in mentality to ordinary men, who were, as he often put it, 'like me in every way'."

For some reason a blush spread rosily over her wide cheek and up her ivory temple, and lost itself in the rich profusion of fair curls.

"I can understand that. And you plan to reproduce his line of experiment in a richer profusion, to do so many trial-and-error creations of life-forms that you cannot help but hit upon the favorable accident of your own birth? Is that it?"

"That is partly what I expect to do, yes."

"But, then, what were the creatures I saw come out of here today? They were not little winged men like these!"

"I have an idea that part of the accident that produced me was due to the projection he used. Here it is . . ." She handed me an ordinary postal card, on which was a painting of Michelangelo's, a single gigantic nude female. I looked at it wonderingly.

"He projected this picture into the fluid and the stimulated cells grouped themselves around it to produce . . . you!"

"YES. Since then he has made many drawings of his own, from which he made the slides for the little men. But I myself am beautiful because the artist was a great one."

"Does that explain your great growth? I don't understand?"

"No, of course not. He spilled the flask of growth hormones, mixed with the di-methionine and the asparatic acid into the fluid, and that caused my great growth. Or perhaps he was influenced by the dream of the picture, which pictures a titaness, a goddess, and so spilled the growth acids on purpose. Who knows what was in his mind?"

"I can't get over what a great ad-

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vance of the techniques of Alexis Carrel and Stanley Reimann has here been accomplished. If Reimann but knew what the old man has accomplished."

"I correspond with him. He does know!"

"Oh, good girl! You must be sure to keep world science informed." I thought she was lying then, but I played along, accepted it.

"I have told him everything except that we produced so many of the little beings. Or that I myself am one. He says he fears to repeat these experiments, for if he were successful, he would be accused of a crime!"

"Yes, he lives in Philadelphia. That is too staid a city in which to create people from liquids."

"He is afraid to make his own work public, for fear of what evil people might do with it. He turns animals into plants, and back again, and similar weird and unbelievable things. He makes the cells of a simple plant become more specialized, almost intelligent. If he but had resources, capital, there is no telling what he might not do."

Here in her own laboratory, the giant maiden did not seem like an impossible thing. She was at home, she knew what she was doing, and was making me understand that she was not an inhuman creature out of a test tube at all.

"If you correspond with the outer world, why then do you fear it?"

"Because Reimann, as well as others, have warned me. They themselves fear interference from backward groups."

"There is a question in it. What attitude *can* people take toward a synthetic form of mankind but that science has replaced them altogether? Industrialists could use these formulas to create slaves, mindless robotic forms . . ."

"Exactly. It is so many-sided a problem that I fear you may be sent here by some group to steal these formulas. There is so much potential harm, or so great possible good in these formulas and processes, simple and inexact as they yet are, that my father made me swear to keep all in my own hands. So, I will do as I will here in this hidden valley of the Andes, and if my work goes awry, why, let God take the blame."

"I give you my oath, I will do nothing against your wishes in this matter. I can not grasp the complex possibilities well enough to decide what should be done, anyway."

"I hope that I can trust you. Time will tell. You intend to remain here, then?"

"As long as I can be of help to you. But, I asked you what kind of creatures were those I saw come out of here today, and you failed to answer. Is it you don't want me to know?"

"Not yet. Not till I am sure of you. If people learned what I planned, an army might come. . . ."

I slept on that. Just what sort of thing was it? It looked like a fat baby, a little bigger, and it walked. But it was not human, for the hands were not human. And I had seen several of them plunge at once into the water and disappear. A human child cannot do that.

CHAPTER III

Aurore's Work

. . . They have only taught him what we know—
That knowledge is not happiness, and science
But an exchange of ignorance for that
Which is another kind of ignorance.
Byron . . . "Manfred"

DAYS, weeks went by, and gradually, little by little, my mind grasped

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the tremendous goal of this girl. It was no wonder she did not want the world to know her plans. For every day a series of strange new creatures left that laboratory, to lose themselves in the air, in the water, or to burrow in the earth.

These last, that burrowed instantly into the earth upon being ushered from the door of creation . . . Rock itself went, powdered into their formula. Round chubby little granite creations, looking like animated stones, round little limbs sturdily moving in unison, round mouths gaping foolishly.

The things she loosed into the air! Made from birds, from condors, from parrots, toucans, all the myriads of bird life in the surrounding jungle were culled over and brought living to be dissolved into that basic life fluid from which Aurore seemed able to reassemble any design for life she wished. And her wish was coming clear to me now. It was to repeople the whole earth with intelligence! I finally put it up to her.

"I think I know what you are planning. You intend the earth, the air and the water itself to contain intelligent life, life which will aid man in the future!"

She smiled. "Superb! Yes, in time there will be voices in the water, thoughts piercing the clouds, the very stones will speak to the feet of men passing by. I have isolated the peculiarity which puzzled my father. I know now why I turned out to have a better mind than his later experiments in life synthesis. And I am turning loose upon all earth a fecund flood of reproductive creatures with minds superior to any. Man will think well, or be ruled by intelligence! It does not matter in what form the intelligence exists. Swimming in the water, burrowing ever farther and more numerous through the earth, breeding ever greater flocks on the mountain-hidden reaches, are little minds of surpassing capacity. And they will remake the earth."

"But . . . how do you know these minds will be friendly to man?"

"Why shouldn't they be? Thought is like mathematics. The same in all minds when it is correct. It is only different, opposed in content, when it is in error. Why should they oppose men's purposes? Men think!"

There was a grim fanatic glitter in her eye when she said this last. Slowly the supreme summation of her intent, of her anger, of her judgment upon men, came to me. Somehow, somewhere, she had absorbed a pretty dark view of the nature of mankind. Perhaps the old Professor had painted a black picture of man's mind and his warring, stupid, cruel nature. She had set herself to bring upon man justice of a kind that would be indisputable, overwhelming. I could not but agree with her analysis and her judgment upon man. He would think well and in agreement with superior minds now, or he would be overwhelmed by their fecund, ever-growing will.

"But man cannot change into a logical, cooperative creature overnight! It will take centuries, ages! And he will ignorantly oppose these strange life-forms when he becomes aware of them—and he will be wiped out by their anger when he sets himself against them."

"Your prophecy may be true, but I think not. He will not be harmed. He will be gently, unknowingly led into the paths of peace, his logic will be strangely straightened by the appearance of logic about him—and wars and diseases, ignorance and cruelty, will disappear before the flood of thinking, corrective lives I loose upon him. You will see . . ."

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"I hope you are right. Else you have destroyed man."

"And if I did? Is he so terribly important? Should he not make way for a more beautiful, a better life-form. He will, unknowing, soon."

"You mean you have already destroyed man with those creatures?"

"Not in the way you think of it. Just in the way that he has existed too long!"

WHAT made the girl, Aurore, think that here, on the edge of the unknown, things wouldn't start happening without control; what she figured those fecund active little animated minds she was creating would do, I don't know! How she expected to control them without teaching, without contact . . . What abstract idea of natural logic she may have had that made her think that the only thing the world needed was more thinking . . . Somewhere in her basic thought, her plans for remaking the natural world around man, was an error, and a big one. I think that she lacked proper training, that somewhere the Professor had failed. I suspect that she, like the little minds, was a wild, untamed primitive spirit; not a product of an age of civilized living, and that error in the old Professor's view of her nature caused the little error that led to the big error. My mind wasn't big enough to grasp the whole interworking of those little fecund creatures impact upon nature about us.

We found the first of the little winged bodies in the cold morning light, down by the edge of that beautiful pool where I had first seen Aurore bathing.

Stiff and cold and dead, he seemed when we bent over him! And over me swept a sudden chilling sensing of menace. Curious, knowing, clever and menacing eyes were watching! I knew it, knew it deep within me with a cold sense of futility, of deep failure—a failure that I realized must engulf all mankind!

The wilderness was watching us! And it did not know us, it was not friendly!

"Here Aurore is definite evidence of the thing I have been trying to warn you of since I realized the scope of your work. These little minds cannot be released immediately after birth. They do not even know you, their creator! Do you sense the menace?"

Under that dead body the ground suddenly heaved, and rippled like a living thing. I stumbled, nearly fell. Through the trees went a retreating, eerie, *meaningful* whistle! A whistle, a sound with words in it like a whisper, gigantic in spread through all the forest, and the words were—"Our creator, hah! These insensitives think they created us!"

The big heroic figure beside me stiffened, stood motionless, head thrown back, listening, drinking in all the myriad sounds of strange life, mixed with the familiar jungle sounds. And slowly, drop by drop, great tears coursed down that noble face. Her eyes turned to mine, and for the first time since I knew her I wished she were small enough to embrace, to comfort, I wanted to take away that intense despair I saw growing within her. Then her words came, titan's voice chanting great moaning meanings in the basic sounds of life-meaning everywhere. The deep roots this woman possessed, sent deep into the heart of the jungle by her upbringing, by her birth from a living mass of cells assembled from a dozen different jungle creatures, came to the surface, broke out in a great chant that was like the voice of Mother Earth herself addressing her many children, her animals, her fishes, her birds . . .

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"Oh my children, this evil that I sense in you. Have you done this thing? Have you failed me, your mother, so soon? Have you failed to learn that all life is mutually helpful, or it is miserable, unhealthy and evil? Have you all failed me, your mother, and turned so soon to war and death? Oh, no! I cannot stand what you have done. I go, I go, I leave you here to war among yourselves!

"Steve," her voice was a sob, all the woman alive now within her. "Steve, take me home." Incongruous request! I took her hand.

I led the way back across the hills to the long low laboratory where she had committed, she thought, the greatest series of blunders ever known to science. But I was not so sure. It was but one death, and our ears might have fooled us, our senses been misled. There was yet a chance that her life-designs would work out as she had intended them to.

Now that tragedy had wakened a sense of danger, a caution within me, that valley where the Chigauri began looked odd! A different sort of place from what it had been. Silent, the many birds that had been there did not now chatter and warble and fight among the great trees. The earth did not look green and bright in the sun, but lay with a grey shadow upon it, a shadow that told me the grass and leaves themselves were affected by something I did not understand at all as I wished to.

Something I did not understand . . . Yes! There was no breeze, yet the grey green leaves, the grass, the great flowers drooping — moved! Lifted, turned, seemed to peer eyelessly, turn back!

I said nothing to Aurore. She had trouble enough, with the little winged man in her arms.

CHAPTER IV

The Growth of the Mind-Mass

". . . There are shades which will not vanish,
There are thoughts thou canst not banish;
By a power to thee unknown,
Thou canst never be alone."
Byron "Manfred"

IT WAS not a pleasant night. I lay on my cot, listening to the great footsteps of Aurore, pacing, pacing. Stopping and listening to the oddly quiet jungle where no cat screamed, no night bird screeched, no animal scuttled through the brush. Menace was in the night, and fear, and a mighty sentience that was not a friend.

Something had happened to the little birthing fecund lives to turn them against ourselves. And if against us, then against all men . . .

The little winged men I could hear, fluttering to stand near Aurore, hastening off again. Could hear their voices long discussing with her; her questioning, plaintive tones; their quick, high-pitched answering.

A few words in her big resonant voice I remembered—"You too have failed me! You have not kept in touch with the new ones, you have not taught them love, you have not done your duty! Something more you must do, and quickly. I left too much to chance, and blindly my own work turns against me. They *cannot* be so *stupid*."

The little men's birdlike voices, I listened carefully to catch their words. "It is not what you think. Yours, your works are all right. It is strange sports, strange tiny things have come from births irregular; the normal reproduction is not the failure. The new ones have had strange children whom

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we could not reach, whose minds were different. Something did not breed true, in the rock people, in the air people, in the plant minds, there has been mutation beyond our power to keep track of. We have tried to tell you, but we were not sure that it was anything numerous. Now we learn, it may be too late!"

So she was right, but she was wrong! Heredity was the factor, these new creatures lacked a determining heredity, and there were mutations, recessions, strange enemies growing with wild, ferocious fecundity—what would she do? What could she do?

Somehow I fell asleep. In the morning when I turned back the blanket, it crumbled in my hands! The pieces were stiff, like bark, or thin stone. Something had invaded the very substance of my bedding. I leaped out to feel of my limbs fearfully. Fear grew in me. I knew it was time to leave this place, Aurore or no Aurore!

I went out into the long low laboratory of life to find it empty of activity. Nowhere were the cheerful little winged men I had come to accept as one accepts perfect machinery, without noticing them much. Their absence brought home to me the seriousness of the trouble that had come upon us. I caught myself thinking of the new lives and their purpose, the whole plan and of Aurore, as "us." It startled me to realize how greatly these different life conditions had changed me in such a short time.

I went out into the half-tamed jungle, not nearly so park-like as the forest was near the fall and the pool where the New Race had lived much longer. I followed the first path my feet struck, seeking for Aurore.

I found her, and I found a new threat to my sanity!

She was communing with some great life force new-come to these jungles, a great natural life-form sprung from a variant mother, some strange fecund sport of the lives she had been creating. I could hear her chanting voice, with the overtones of wild nature, of the savage heritage of the children of nature that was in her. I knew . . . AWE!

"O Stranger of the green forest paths, come to me and love me and explain—why have you chosen the way of struggle when We of the New Race offer you peace and help for your plans, protection for your strangeness, understanding of your newness? Reveal yourself to me, green Titan, explain yourself to me, that I may make peace between my people and those lives which follow your way. Tell me of the reasons for your evil deeds, give me understanding that these deaths may stop . . ."

I CAME up to her, found her kneeling beneath a giant camphor-wood, her eyes directed toward the green depths of the jungle. And there was a stirring and an answer to her voice, a moving of the tree limbs that was unnatural, a sentient something lying there upon the whole dark forest and looking at her with fascinated eyes. . . . Eyes that were invisible but felt.

I stood silent and waiting for the answer to her prayer. I knew she had been chanting to the strange life that had developed here beyond her plans, for a long time before I arose. I knew that it had listened, waited for the eerie, strongly felt life to reveal itself to her exhortation.

And down from the far-reaching forested hills, across the limbs of mighty forest, something swept nearer and nearer, a multitude of somethings, unseen but terribly alive.

No voice made answer, but I could

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feel an energy sweeping down on us from the trees, an earthy pulsing of strange meaningful strength from the earth under our feet, a beating in the air itself as of invisible wings. But I could not understand . . . but she could understand, and her voice repeated the message. I could feel the answering, corroborating sweep toward us.

She said: "You are a small intelligent being which has no self, but a communal self, and you grow as numerous as the atoms of matter itself. Is that what you are telling me? You fear the discovery our work will bring to you, you fear me and what I may do to you —for you know of my creating of the forms of life, and you know that they are planned creations for a purpose. Yourselves are unplanned, and you fear I will destroy you. Is that what the conflict in your minds consists of?"

"How could I hurt you if I wished to?" Her voice answered the rustling of the leaves, the throbbing of the earth. "How could I reach you, who are everywhere? How do you know you are unplanned by me? How do you know I do not approve of your existence? Why do you refuse to be part of the great plan?"

"What is it?" I heard myself asking, unable to keep my curiosity bridled.

"I think it is a mind-cell sport, which has become so adaptive from the stimulation of the fluid that it reproduces itself, which is unlike the normal mind cell, you know. It has become reproductive, has assumed a parasitic or symbiotic adaptiveness, learned to live within the fibers of the plants and trees, learned to live in the bodies of the little plants and microscopic animals everywhere. In doing this, it has managed to retain the faculty of communication hereditary in all mind cells. Whether these particular cell types are communicating by means of nerve fibres they have grown between themselves, or by some mutual exchange of telepathic response inherent in them, I do not know. But what we have here is a brain, a mighty growth of mind matter symbiotic with both plants and animals, making the trees as well as the earth all servants of one communal ego, just as mind cells are in our brain!"

"Is that bad?" I asked, stupidly.

"IT MAY be. Several of the little men are dead, because of uncontrolled and unconsidered reactions from this mighty growth. They stepped upon a root or a plant filled with these new type cells, and caused pain. The wild, natural reaction took place, they removed the injury source by killing the unknowing little creatures that caused the pain. The same accident can happen at any time to ourselves, so be extremely careful where you walk, and make no sudden violent motions. Anything can set off this reaction. The mind must develop a block for this particular reaction of revenge."

"How does it kill?" I asked, looking at the superficially normal appearing and empty scene of trees, rocks, foliage and occasional small darting animals. There was apparently nothing there to cause the sense of extreme menace that was present.

"It kills by sending strong thought currents into the body which disorganize the functions of the organs. Whether telepathically, or by means of some fibre of nerve conductive, I don't know. The mind-mass must develop control, consciousness centers able to sense and evaluate and order things aright. Else we are doomed, and probably all life as we know it."

"Can't you isolate some of the wild cells, and develop a counter life-form, as they do with insect pests?"

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Aurore looked at me scornfully. "Don't even think such thoughts. It is because it sensed the possibility of such activity against it that the great mind-mass has killed. Unless it understands we will not harm it, there is no hope!"

"It can become a killer, and it will kill and kill, and no one will understand in time to stop it!" The terrible possibilities in this run-away growth of thinking life cells dismayed me. It was too big a thing for me to think about intelligently.

"It can, but it won't unless now, in its formative period, it adopts the nature of the killer—the nature of the warring ants and the pattern of survival that animates all the struggling beasts of earth. That is why we must now educate and civilize this new titanic force, make it useful and benevolent. It is yet a wild, young form of life."

"Yes, I know," I said dully. I couldn't see how we with our limited resources could do much about teaching many square miles of animated trees, of thinking earth, of whispering grass and leaves and air—that it had better be a good citizen or get pinched. I couldn't see it!

BUT Aurore could see how to do what was needed. Her young mind was uninhibited by the ages of failure hereditary in modern man's thinking. Undismayed, she spent the day talking to . . . an invisible sentience, apparently. I spent the day listening, and feeling very much like a heathen propitiating some savage god with futile prayers. I sat by her side, watching, and waiting for the tragedy I felt to be inevitable. I had seen the bodies of the little winged men!

Once, I mused, when life first began on earth, when conditions were more favorable to the development of life from its small beginnings—the whole earth may have been one sentient thing, as this jungle now was! Perhaps then every living thing had been permeated with intercommunicating life, such as this runaway growth of mind cells. Then rocks would truly have had tongues, trees listening ears, and the mountains spoke each to the other with voices of thunder. Then magic could have been, and those who understood the universal mind-mass able to get obedience from inanimate things. Trees would have bent to such a sorcerer's voice, and the winds would have answered his will! Birds would have willingly flown on his errands, and the little races of animals done his bidding. Perhaps once such magic existed!

"And perhaps it now exists again," a voice spoke inside my head, and I knew it was an echo of the consciousness of the great mind-mass.

For whether it was my own mind, or the new great one, I heard many little voices saying—"and we bow to no masters such as you, or do any man's bidding."

I could hear Aurore's voice cajoling, and it seemed she answered the same little voices as well as the big one—"Then it was, now it will be again."

". . . and if that once living great mind saw fit to help and to obey the better kinds of men, why should you refuse? Why should you hate or fear us?"

The great thought voice, the murmuring trees and the hillside's menacing will made answer: "We do not hate or fear you. But we intend to live within you, to make you our servants and our limbs, a part of us. Then we cannot hurt or fear each other."

". . . or think, either. The individuals must remain free. Your hosts must be only those life-forms who have not already a brain. You must give to them a brain, not take any away.

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The trouble on earth is that same lack of many individual brains with fresh new views. You can be a great mass-mind for the lives which have not had a mind—but you must not trespass on the minds of man or any minds that have developed their way of life so long toward that goal of life. . . . You must not do this thing!"

"We will think about it, and we will decide. We are many, yet one. Yet we will take time, and make our decision, though how it can be otherwise than what it now is, I do not see. I am young, and I am many diverse things in one. I am a we, or I am a unit, one thing. I know not. Our ways are different, yours is an old way—you have taken from your teacher ways of thought not new."

The menace subsided and a peace came again upon the forest, the limbs ceased to pulsate with a strange movement, the grass ceased to lean toward us and to peer, the far mountains ceased to seem like great beasts about to spring. The illusion given all the scene by the mighty thought presence of the mind-mass interpermeating all of it vanished, and it became again what one expected. Aurore and I returned again to her long workshop. I was surprised to see the sun setting, it had not seemed so long.

AURORE and I sat that night in the big lab, staring at the shadows and worrying. Would the big, young mind-mass obey and co-operate, could it co-ordinate its growth and activity to the uses and needs of all life? Or must all life flee before its absorption, flee and flee until the growing web of thought-cells had embraced the whole earth?

I couldn't think. I only looked at Aurore's big worried face, and paced up and down, listening to the subtle muted far sounds of the night, and trying to pick out the difference that had come over the New World, itself different again from the normal jungle life. The difference was an animate threatening sentience which had not been present—like a great cat pressing against one's leg, not to smooth the fur or rub its head, but smelling out the food value. The difference was that we had become now aliens in our own land, Aurore's work and plans had become no longer paramount, but subservient to a greater, more savage will. The little men came in the night and gathered around Aurore in fear, chattering to her in unintelligible syllables. There had been another death, they were afraid of the earth itself, to step upon it was too apt to be a violation of the mind-mass. The night dragged on and on. More and more of the little winged men and women gathered within the seeming safety of the big building, it was filled with them. Aurore talked to them with the long bird trills I had first heard her use in calling them to her. Sang or talked or just made sounds which they liked, how did I know? I could not understand.

In the morning the big woman came to a decision, and we made ready to leave. I could see it was a terrible decision, but when we left the laboratory and stood outside in the morning's light, a great circle of grey earth and green-grey trees had changed from their normal colors. All around the building the mind-mass growth had approached in the night. Wherever its source of growth had begun, wherever it had been tending before, it was evident that its purpose had now become to devour, to absorb and sweep over the home of ourselves.

Walking close to the edge of the grey circle of menace, I peered closely to see just what sort of thing it was. From every limb hung long grey threads, like

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spider webs endlessly repeating, and along the earth the grey web of threads ran thickly. I pointed out the threads of communication to Aurore, who stared at them for a moment, then went to the lab for apparatus.

Returning with delicate copper wires, she made fast to two separate groups of threads, delicately with her finger tips, and led the uncoiling wires back into the lab. Here she attached the wires to the knobs of an encephalograph, started the machine. I asked her: "What do you expect to learn of the stuff?"

"I can at least find out if it is sane or if its vibrations are insane in nature."

I watched the tape unroll, the little pens dance and jiggle their lines of tell-tale marks. I watched her compare the tape with others in her stock of records. I myself made a few summations, too. That tape was a different kind of thought wave, several different types of waves intermingled, than on any other tape!

"If you compare it with a normal human's waves, one like myself, you can tell better what it will be like in character."

"Yes, I know. It is very different, but the hectic jiggling abrupt waves of the manic depressive are not there. The mind-mass is potentially sane—it is just untrained; like a young child, it has savage cruel impulses which must be curbed and taught the proper expression. It must learn to play, to relax, and not to take things so seriously. It angers so easily, and kills . . . hmmm."

"AND it's trying to surround us! If that isn't deliberate murder what is? It is sending long wings of growth across the valley below to cut off our escape. Once we are fully surrounded by the grey growth, it will absorb us into its mind, our selves will become a part of the mind-mass!"

"How do you know you are not already surrounded?"

"Did you say that, Aurore?"

"I said nothing!"

"I heard a voice that said we are already part of the thing! Is that true?"

"In order for you to hear it, it would seem to have planted the first growing cells within you."

"It must talk with such unattached cells by telepathy, eh?"

"I suppose so. I am busy."

She had attached the two wires from the mind-mass fibres now to a big radio, was fiddling with the dials. She made various adjustments from time to time, and from the speaker came a hum, broken now and then by sharp sounds of static. To this she paid no attention, kept adding tuning units, variometers and tuning coils, spider-webs and honeycombs, to the intake circuit. Each time she hooked up she listened, twisting the dials. I realized she was trying to tune in upon the thoughts of the mass of growth. And she succeeded—just as simply as that! She created a thought-augmentative device from simple radio parts that morning!

From the speaker began to pour a flood of sound; not words, mind, but unrelated echos of sound; the distant roar of a jaguar, the thrash of the giant alligator's tail as it surged toward its prey, the calls of birds, the endless rustle of leaves . . . all the sounds of the life of the forest for miles around began to pour from the speaker! "It is what the mind is hearing and sensing . . ." explained Aurore to my wondering gaze at the speaker.

Underneath the sounds that I recognized was a vast layer of sounds and subtler things than sounds, little augmented meanings of life. "Those

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are all the lives the fibres have contacted," said Aurore.

You could hear the hungry roots pushing the soil through to search for water, you could hear the bark of the trees closing its pores against too much heat—you could hear the moss-layer of the forest bed speaking of the dryness, speaking of the dimness, enjoying the day. The whole world of nature had a voice there from that speaker, from the coils of the device came electric meaning, and I sat entranced by the x-ray nature of the view of life that it was giving.

And over and above all the many sounds of the many single lives in that mass of meaning—was a great roar of hunger, a reaching ferocious need, a menacing and frightening meaning of huge absorption—I knew that this was the mind of the mass of interpenetrating growth. The longer I listened to it the more frightened I became. It was like the roar of a mob upon its way to loot food-stores, to kill the aristos . . . it was like the first great waves from a tidal wave's rise, the first water to race down some valley at the bursting of a dam. It was like the sound made by army ants as they march, stripping all life from their path and leaving only a bleached desert behind. And that fear that man has before the army ant was present here in greater measure. There was nothing one could do unless it turned aside.

"We must flee that thing at once, Aurore! It will devour us and forget us all in one instant."

"For now, we must flee, yes, friend."

THAT was a weird migration! Down along the banks of the Rio Chigauri we went, the giant figure of Aurore leading the way, pack animals in a string behind llamas, burros, all heavily laden, a string of a hundred animals driven along by the chittering little men. As she went, now and again Aurore gave a call; not the eerie bird cry with which she summoned the winged men, but a gurgling kind of watery roar; and from the racing water of the Chigauri would pop a head, human at first glance, but one would see in a second, not human at all! The mouth was made to catch and eat fish, the gills along the jaw-line to breathe water. The eyes were more opaque and less active than a human's—swimming, the head would approach the shore, and after it swiftly would come ripples, more heads breaking the surface. Out upon the shore would climb the water-men she had created and loosed, merman and merwomen, long and clean-limbed, though not as large as humans. They seemed to average not more than four or four and a half feet in height. These intelligent creatures would stand in a line along the shore, their leader approach Aurore with an obeisance, walking quite gracefully on wide-webbed feet. For a few moments she would speak with them, telling them of the menace of the new wild growth, of her temporary retreat before its threat.

Back into the boiling rapids of the Chigauri they would plunge, swim off, disappear in the waves. Water-people, intelligent, living in the water as we live on land! Serving the command of the giant girl—truly it was a new world she was making!

"Does the mind-mass invade the water, too?" I asked Aurore.

"Not yet, but it may when it learns it can. Until then, these water-people will keep us informed of its doings. They will serve as an inner post of spies upon its progress. That is what I am telling them. To watch and wait and tell me always of its doings and of its thoughts."

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"Aurore, why can't you furnish the radio-telaugmentative apparatus you invented with an aerial and stronger audio equipment? You could listen in on the mind-mass as we do to a radio!"

"I will try it. You have made a good suggestion. But I suspect that the natural thought-waves do not have such a great range . . ."

"Telepathic minds sense thought at great range without any equipment. With such a mass of mind and with augmentative equipment, you should be able to hear its thought. That would be better than anything these water people could tell you."

CHAPTER V

"Man Against the Mind-Web"

"On a throne of rocks, in a robe of clouds,
With a diadem of snow.
Around his waist are forests braced,
The avalanche in his hand."
Byron's "Manfred"

WE RETREATED steadily but slowly before swiftly growing grey webs of mind cells—a great grey edge of growth masking all the clean beauty of the earth, hanging from the limbs of the trees, spreading in a line along the grass. The front of a battle, a war on a major scale, that line where the grey met the green!

Aurore perfected her augmentative device for listening to the mind, and we could listen now without needing to approach it and make a connection with the fibres. We feared it more now, it was better that we did not have to get near it.

"Aurore, you've got to call in the forces of civilization. You can't let this thing grow until it's too big for them to fight. Its thought is becoming a greater menace by the hour."

She did not answer, only sat listening to an ever-growing volume of intermingled, yet co-ordinated thoughts that streamed from the speaker of the radio-like device.

That mind was young, mighty, absorptive, learning, and with a will to dominate a consciousness of self-ruling other selves. A thing permeating every other life with the fibrous nerve connections and cells of its being, ruling those lives, absorbing nerve energy from those lives, and growing, terribly growing. We could not know how deep the grey filamentous blanket of life was, but the edge of that battle for all earth stretched in a line on either hand as far as we could learn about.

The threat of that growth and the menace of that mind, listening to it, trying to conceive how to stop it, to bring its self into cooperation with our aims, brought Aurore and myself closer, knit the little men, the ground people burrowing beneath, the water people, all the many lives that were fleeing with us away from the center of their birth —into a close unity with each other. I felt and understood now what it was we had to give the world, and what a great gift it would be to give them the mind-mass as a friend, instead of a devouring enemy. To teach it how to use without absorbing and how to grow without dominating all the life it touched. To use the mighty powers of thought that must lie dormant in its mass.

But the beginnings of the growth of that mind mass had been too savage, too alone, too utterly dog-eat-dog in the jungle.

The savage battle for survival which had been its lot in its lost, unwatched beginnings had formed its character, determined its hereditary slant, it

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meant to win and to dominate, it could not think of mutual effort toward a common goal with any other life. Day after day we retreated before the rapidly marching rim of growth, listening with the telaug to its thought, a symphony of triumph, of fecund joy in power, of plans for being all, everywhere, of being in time the world mass —one mind—me! Over and over that simultaneous ego vibrant in the center of each of those thinking, multiplying cells said—"*Me, Me, Me*—I rule, and I grow, and all things must and will do as I wish."

AS THE days passed and Aurore pondered and planned and listened and despaired, it grew upon me that the ultimate disaster to man's dominance on earth was here occurring. This thing would not stop growing, this great grey fibrous absorptive life would not meet a master, would in time embrace the whole world! Within the mass we could see even now great jaguars, leopards, men, native Indians, other forms of life, caught, held motionless by the greater will of the mind-mass, held while the mind matter grew mycelium all through their limbs. Held there to become focal points, mounds of vaguely life-shaped growth, grey and pink and startling masses of fibrous interpenetrated mind cells. Over the telaug we could hear the strangely transformed thought of their minds, taking on the character and vaunting power-hungry ego of the mind-mass, these once animal selves becoming not themselves but a part of the great growing thing.

Desperate, Aurore turned her mind to ways of fighting the great grey beast.

She built broadcast apparatus from the slim resources of electrical supplies left by the Professor. The still child-like body and youthful, playful mind of the big pink man that had once been Professor Nebski helped with this work, his nature was adopted to intricate mechanical work, and under her guidance and desperately planning mind he became another pair of hands for her. The three of us, working furiously under continual necessity of moving on down the river banks—built a big portable radio-wave broadcaster. This Aurore used to rebroadcast a scrambled version of the very thought she received from the mind-mass. Confused at the mad, meaningless jumble of reversed and noisily jumbled thought-waves broadcast; the line of growth, which had heretofore steadily advanced, wavered, stopped! A thousand yards from the bellowing thought broadcast the line of growth went on, but from us it slowly retreated now, leaving us on an island of security. All day and all night Aurore experimented with the new weapon, trying everything, even sending Jazz phonograph records out on the waves the mind could not help receiving.

Finally she made a recording of her own voice. This record she sent out over the big thought-wave augmentive device. The voice was a command—"Recede, cease your everlasting cancerous will to dominate. Become a friend, work for all, not for one. Think of us, of all life—as a friend, and how you may make our life better. Cease to destroy the minds about you, become instead a helpful part of them . . ."

I suggested taking a cable bearing this augmented voice record in the thought-waves frequency and attaching the ends by means of many splayed out small wires to the fibres of the nerve ganglia of the mind-mass. Some of these had grown quite thick and visible —were big enough to work with easily. Still I feared to touch it, feared it would begin its growth within me, handled it

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with rubber gloves as I made the connections.

All day that record, and similar ones she made to experiment with—pumped its electrical orders into the growth through the cable. The impact of that commanding energy of thought could not help but have results, it was so vast in voltage by comparison with the energy in the small nerve fibers of the mind-mass. Beyond the ends of the cable a great cone of difference began to be visible in the grey, shrouding mind growth over the jungle. There the steadily rustling, slight motion of the tree limbs, which had been so noticeable and so inimical—ceased, and a quiet, a peace came to the grey mass. But the line of change was very marked, we had tamed a part of the mass of mind-cells, only to have the rest, the greater part go on as before. We spread out our cables, attached them all around us in a great circle to the nerve fibres of the mind—and the island of our security broadened, spread visibly hour by hour. We had learned much!

BUT it was too late! Listening as we sometimes did to the radio-broadcasts from the coast cities of South America and to the radio programs from the United States, one night a disheartening news-message brought us again to despair.

"Strange growth in jungle frightens South Americans! Yesterday, a plane arrived from Rio De Janeiro bearing the news that vast areas of the jungles, as well as some settled areas, have been overrun with a strange new type of growth which apparently attacks all forms of life. Within the masses, grey in color and covering already the whole head of the valley of the Amazon itself—no life at all can be discerned. In the words of the aviator who brought in the report—which has been whispered of and disbelieved for some months — 'Nothing more frightening than this growth can be imagined! It looks like the end of the world unless something is done at once to stop it!'"

Aurore looked at me, great tears forming in her eyes, a sob choking in her lips. Isolated from the world as we were, and fighting our lone battle over an area of but a score of miles or so, we had not realized that our efforts had fought back the growth from around us only to have it race on and on elsewhere. Many many thousands of square miles it had covered in its mad race against all other life-growth—and we had foolishly fought a tiny segment of the circle, thinking it all.

Aurore flung herself down upon the grass by the big-wheeled truck of electrical supplies, bearing the throbbing, humming transmitter of nervous impulses, and sobbed bitterly. The radio news item told us we had failed. The mind-mass was out in the world of man, and would continue to grow no matter what our puny efforts accomplished! We had lost!

I sat watching the giant girl, realizing all over that she was but a child, a great and noble child—whose failure was foreordained because of the lack of proper training and development. Softly I explained:

"Aurore, do not feel too badly. You dared greatly, you took a chance for the hope of men, and you lost. Men did not have much worth worrying about, yet you worried. You loved mankind, though you are so different. The very cells of your body are made from other life-forms—your heredity is different, incalculable factors have entered into your mind's formation, your growth and being. Do not weep. Be a Goddess as you seem to be, fight on and on—think and plan and try—

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soon or late we will win. We must plan something that is as great, as far reaching, as mighty in power as is this mind mass. We must create a counter growth—try something from the hair of the dog that bit us!"

She sat up swiftly, her tear streaked face beautiful in its sudden change to interest and hope again.

"'THE hair of the dog that bit us.' That is a strange phrase, and it makes me think. Explain it to me!"

I explained the old superstition of making a potion from the hair of the dog that bit one, and drinking it as a protection. And how the principle was sound, as proved by anti-toxins and vaccines which were made from disease germs and used against themselves.

"Exactly," Aurore cried, her great voice with its contradictory youthful tones echoing dully from the grey festoons of forest, from the grey-mossed rocks, from the whole valley. And the mind-mass murmured back, "There is nothing you can do, you foolish human. Concede defeat, and become a part of me, the great me of all me's, the mighty world mind. Let me embrace you and find peace, peace, peace . . ."

"Oh, shut up! You are a foolish runaway cell, and no being of thought at all. You will one day sent for me to help you, and I will say—you refused me, and I refuse you."

AURORE'S voice was triumphant, joyful for the first time in many hectic weeks. The little people, their wings dropping and themselves despondently accompanying us for many weeks when no use was found for them, leaped to attention at the new sound in her voice. I knew she had conceived a new plan of action.

"Look, Aurore, before you start anything new, send over your broadcast the details of your work so far, the cause of this growth, what it is. Put this on a record, send it continuously on full power on a beam toward the United States. It will be heard, there will be an understanding there of what it is man must fight. It is our duty, even if we die, to send this information to the centers of life in the cities, so that science has an inkling of the nature of the threat. It will save them all the trial and error work of learning what the nature of the mind-mass . . ."

This we did, and as we shut off the transmitter and turned the great beam aerial toward the north, began to send again on a radio-beam, the peace that had been caused within the grey mass of growth about our island of natural brown and green and quiet shore—became again a tormented tossing, a vicious, squirming activity came again upon the surrounding forest. The vast mind-mass was sending in commands over the cell-fibers. Over the neural cables running from clump to clump—was coming again the central ego orders of the great mind-mass, and the cells were obeying, were again active; spreading, absorbing, growing and dominating the whole. Again that slow grey march began, and our little island of immunity began to shrink rapidly. For an hour we repeated the record of information toward the north, hoping for reception, but unknowing. Eagerly I spun the dials of our receiver, hoping some answer would come from the great centers of civilization — but nothing came! Jazz, speeches, commercials, not an acknowledgement.

Aurore shut off the transmitter, switched back to the record of command to the mind-mass, and again along the cables the power began to pump peace and silence and order back into the grey threat of the blanket of life. The menace retreated, the line

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of growth stopped its steady advance. I nodded.

"We have done our duty by the race of man. Now we will turn again to your new plan."

Aurore turned again to her vats and chemicals and solutions of nutrient and enzymes, amino acids and gland secretions. On the burro-loads of our caravan most of her supplies had accompanied us—and the little men turned eagerly again to their work of capturing a supply of wild animals for the supply of prime fluid, the first form of life, as I thought of it.

Into the dissociating fields of magnetic and the gurgling green vats of fluid the netted creatures were tumbled. All about us the wild creatures had gathered, retreating before the grey threat even as ourselves; there was an easy supply of small creatures, agoutis, water rats, armadillos, iguanas, small forest deer. There was a number of great cats skulking on the far rims of our island of safety, an area of perhaps fifty acres on the shores of the Chigauri. These the little hunters left severely alone.

AURORE stopped the dissociation process for each large body, as the skull became thin. We pulled out the indicated body, she opened the skull, removed the pulsing, living brain, cast it into a separate vat. I did not know what was in her mind. But I saw that she had a plan, was working furiously and without regard for the pain she caused the living subjects. Soon she had a large vat, perhaps a ton, of living grey matter, which she resolved into dissociated cells.

A fluid; living, growing cells unattached; and each and every cell a thinking cell from an active living brain.

On a card she made a swift little sketch of a thing that resembled an octopus. A big bulbous center, surrounded by at least a hundred tentacular arms, and each arm divided at the end into innumerable tiny fibers. At the end of each fiber was a little clutching hand-like appendage. This drawing she projected into the seething fluid of mind cells, watched them form around the force lines of the magnetic field projector.

When she finished, a horrible appearing creature pulsed within the tank. Great, grey body; surrounded by a mass of writhing tentacles; eyeless, mouthless, intensely alive.

I realized now what she intended. She had created a master-cell, a gigantic repetition of the mind-cell itself! Swiftly she detached two cables from the far grey edge of the enemy mind-mass, fastened the copper ends to two of the tentacles of the master-cell. Orally she talked into the microphone of the mind-wave transmitter.

"I have created you, newborn one, for the purpose of bringing under control the wild, unthinking growth of a mass of mind-cells that threatens the death of all other life on earth. You are to advance into that mass of mind-cells and take your place as one more cell in its network. You are to think and control the thought of all the rest, you are to co-ordinate the growth and the aims and the un-organized thought of all those mind-cells, you are to be the ego, the conscious well-intended soul of that mind. Answer me, is your will and your memory, your intent what I have provided you shall be?"

The abstract thought of the great ugly animal welled back through the augmentative hook-up of the transmitter-receiver . . .

"Yes, creator, I understand and will do as you command. I am able to think very well and I understand more

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than you think . . ."

Even as I marveled at her work in thus building from scratch a thinking mind of that vast size and getting intelligent response from it—the sound of an aeroplane overhead brought us both to attention. The cables remained attached to the great grey beast in the tank, and we ran to the river bank to watch the swoop and spiral and bank of a landing plane. It settled to the water, an amphibious job with a closed cabin, and rode its bow-wave close to the steep shore line.

I shouted with sudden joy at the bright-haired figure with the red cheeks who climbed out on the wing.

"Pug, Pug . . . what's the news? Is this official or are you playing hooky again? Come ashore, girl, and explain yourself!"

"What do you think I'm trying to do, you ape? Throw me a line before the current takes me back to the coast!"

I threw her a rope, waded out to help her ashore dry-shod. She began to upbraid me, and from her it sounded swell . . .

"FOUR days! You swore you'd be back! The next thing I hear, you're dead. I didn't believe it. I knew you had got into something. Then there came this news broadcast about the horrible grey web, and I knew. So I took a chance, came to look for you. Naturally you're right in the middle of the grey web! What is it, excess grey matter you had no use for? Somebody splatter your brains over the landscape, and you're trying to pick them up again, so you can come home? Do you think anybody'd notice they were missing? You needn't have worried. It would never be noticed!"

As I set her down she got her first good look at the gigantic, near nude form of Aurore. This stopped her flow of impromptu oratory, but only for a second.

"Well, introduce me! Naturally when you philander, you do it in a big way, don't you? Try and tell *me* you haven't been out with a woman. I'm supposed not to notice her, am I? Can you explain her satisfactorily? Just what is it all about anyway?"

"Aurore, this is my fiancée, Pug Ranscom. Her right name is Jean, but everyone calls her Pug, because of her nose. Her bark is worse than her bite, as you can see."

The giant girl bent and placed her hand on Pug's cheek, turning her face up to the light to get a good look at her. They looked at each other for a moment, then for some unknown reason, they both laughed. The ice was broken, as far as I could see, right away.

"You know, I should hate you!" Pug's voice was bitter. "This renegade man of mine had a wedding date with me some months ago! Has he been much of a nuisance?"

"He has been very useful. You see, this grey web, as you call it, is my fault, and he has been helping me fight it. He could hardly run away, even to get married. You must not blame him. It would have been cowardly to leave."

"Don't stick up for him. I'll only be suspicious. But that web of yours has the whole world in cold shivers. There are sane people suggesting bombing it with atom bombs!"

"They aren't through with it yet, Pug." I said, "Unless something checks it soon, it will overrun the whole world, and it means the end of mankind."

"What is it, anyway? It looks like that stuff we used to get on the trees back home, on the cedars . . . You know, Red Spider, they called it. Only this is grey, and it's more frightening. But it grows just as impossibly fast,

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doesn't it!"

"It's an ordinary brain cell that has learned to reproduce at a terrific rate. And it thinks of itself as one thing, one big brain. But so far it hasn't spent much time thinking, just growing."

"Maybe it needs something to think about. Why don't you let it listen in to the U.N. debates. Then it'd go to sleep . . ."

The huge grey Master cell that Aurore had just synthesized chose this moment to crawl out of the vat. Pug, whom I had never known to show feminine weakness before in a time of stress, promptly fainted in my arms. I looked at Aurore, and saw almost the first smile on her face since I had known her. She seemed to understand Pug better than myself.

"AURORE, before we release the Master cell, hadn't we better take its thought-wave record on the encephalograph, and if it is sane and well-intended, indoctrinate it with concepts it can use? Sort of hypnotize it into usefulness, or something?"

"I will do what I can. But it is my opinion that the character of a creation is inborn, determined by the nature of the mixture of determining agents in the genes and chromosomes, is a result of the admixture of the formula parts, their proportions. But we will try a little pep talk. You know many animals are born with their instincts already able to direct them in life. They do not learn to be good or bad, they have a character when they are born. So with these creatures. Their growth is too rapid for it to be otherwise."

I deposited Pug on a blanket, promptly forgot her in helping Aurore in her work with the big, grey, smooth animal. But our work, as she predicted, only told us what the creature's first thoughts had told us. It had sprung from that solution fully endowed with mind, and its nature seemed as developed as if it had lived a thousand years. I thought of insects, of spiders, of the myriads of tiny creatures on earth who do all sorts of complicated operations in their life without ever seeming to need to learn anything. A spider knows how to spin a web as soon as it springs from the egg. So with this creature, its nature had to be determined by something in the synthesizing ingredients; there seemed little we could do about telling a mind as big as this one how to think.

"You see," Aurore said, "it is the offspring, the melting together of billions of separate mind cells, each of which inherited an age of hereditary predetermined patterns of thought. All of those possible patterns of thought are now being resolved, used, looked at and considered within the strange composite fabric of the mind within this grey shapeless mass we have created. What it is, what it will do, depends upon so many factors, inherited memory, race memory, the adaptive stimulation I produced by adding aspartic acid in large quantities—will result in making it able to overcome its problems with immediate adaptations of its nature. That *is* what we call thought. It has no eyes, no mouth. To see, it must use other minds; to eat, it must have other cells work for it, become part of it. It must splice itself onto that runaway mind-mass which is our problem, and it must rule those thought-cells to make them support it. That is why we must release it at once. Now, let it go. I have calculated all these factors nicely, and it needs the nourishment of that mass of mind-cells. You will see. Watch it work."

I helped her detach the two cable ends which were still fast to the ten-

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tacles of the mind-beast, watched it ooze sluggishly toward the grey-green line of the island of immunity's edge. Into the tangled grey web of ominous growth it pulled its big body, on and on, settling at last over a great grey clump of the webs. Its tentacles reached out in a circle, began swiftly to weave the webs fast to its tentacle ends. Soon it was itself like a clump of mind-mass, from it in every direction went the grey threads of cells.

"Turn up the telaug, I want to hear its first contacts with the ego of the mind-mass. Now we will know who is to be the master, the mind-mass, or our new Master cell."

I SPUN the dial of the device till the multi-thoughts of the mind-mass rolled out in a vast volume. Not yet had the Master cell made any impression, not yet had the dominating ego of the endless mass of that mind noticed the advent of a new member of their tribe. Would there be any effect?

"We cannot expect an effect at once. The mind-mass is so huge. We must make more and more of these Master cells. What my plan is . . . to create here a number of powerful Master cells which will grow to be the central ego of the mind-mass by virtue of strength and ability. Such is the way the normal mind centers form, they grow that way because they inherit the ability so to grow. I have given these Master cells the ability to control the mind-mass. They will do it in time, I am pretty sure. But the growth changes have to take place. I am sure their creation gives them a greater ability than the haphazard growth of the mind mass."

I saw the light. "Then you plan to control the Master cells, and through them the whole of the mind-mass. It will become a servant . . ."

"Something of the kind may take place. Do not think about it, or an oppositional effort may take place within the mind-mass . . ."

That voice I had come to recognize as the voice of the ego of the mind-mass bellowed at us from the loud-speaker.

"I hear your plans, and I will have to take steps to counteract your efforts. I will not be ruled. I alone will rule!"

Immediately following this, another lesser, but somehow more normal, thought voice made itself heard . . . "The voice is disturbed, not itself. The true self will presently bring order, and life will become pleasant again. This fierce over-penetration must cease. We will lose all power to think if we burden ourselves with every life-form."

"Is that new voice the Master cell?"

Aurore's face was a glory of triumph. "Of course, what else. Get busy, and we will make more of the big cells. They are bound to win, by their nature. Thought is to them what hands are to monkeys, what claws are to moles, what teeth are to a crocodile: a way to get food. It will use every possible combination of thought impulses to get what it wants. And I know what it wants. It wants exactly what you and I want, an interesting life full of rich experience, mental experience, you see. Hence it must make the mind-mass-cells serve its will, or be frustrated. Its purposes are vastly different from the confused multi-ego of the mind-mass, and it is an individual, it knows what it is doing and why. Oh, I do not doubt. But whether the battle will be over in time to save the cities of the world from the growth of the grey mass, I cannot say. We can only hope, and work."

Pug had come around, was standing watching us with wondering eyes. The little winged men, Aurore and myself went to work, netting the unfortunate

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animals who had refuged in the island of green safety, only to find themselves hunted even here. Some of them crashed away into the fearful grey web in fright. But we filled the vats, and the process of creating a synthesized mind-cell of gigantic size began again.

WE WORKED all night, and Pug tuned in the Northern broadcasts to listen to the frantic reports of the "Threat to the World," as the newscasters were calling it. "The grey menace from the jungle," the "Web of Death" was advancing across Central America. Flyers were bombing it without effect. Cities along its path had been evacuated, and every road away from the spreading circle of grey growth was crowded with terror-stricken humans. Poison gas was tried, with little effect. It lay across half of South America, the newsmen screamed, and nothing was stopping it. "Mankind was doomed!"

Then we found that someone had noticed us! "A little island of natural green in the very center of the grey circle of death has been discovered. Scientists are being dispatched to this tiny circle to discover what has kept the circle of green alive and healthy and free of the grey death. The hope of the world lies now in a tiny circle of green on the slopes of the Andes!"

Pug shouted at me above the blare of the telaug. "Company's coming! Put another leaf in the table!"

Toward morning, exhausted by our labor, Aurore and myself dropped beside Pug to listen to the news-broadcasts. Aurore was intensely interested when:

"Reports from refugees of the area which is now the center of the Web of Death say that the terror originates in a gigantic female whom they call the Witch of the Andes. They credit her with supernatural powers and abnormal mental equipment. They say that it would never have happened if an operative from an American Intelligence Bureau had not been sent to stop her activities. Something made her angry, and she loosed the evil upon mankind in consequence. There is little to verify this wild report, however. But the Witch of the Andes tale is a very persistent legend, and not a new one."

Another voice took up where this one left off—"It is interesting to speculate that perhaps the scientific expedition sent to examine the island of immunity in the Web of Death may be on their way to the very home of the Witch of the Andes. If they find a gigantic female in that island of green, will she tell them how to stop the terror? Is it possible that island of immunity is her home, the only place in the world immune to the Grey Web? Interesting, but highly improbable. I predict that expedition will find there the cause and the remedy of the terror that sweeps upon us. I predict that man will survive this sudden threat long enough to wipe himself out with atom bombs."

I shut off the radio, turned back to listen to the quite intelligent and more pertinent sounds issuing from the telaug attuned to the thought of the monstrous growth itself. Now, mingled with the monotonous murmur of the mind-mass, was a new thread of thought-sound, an abstract meaning which seemed curiously to struggle with the repetitious urge of the other, greater sound. There were two spirits struggling now within that mind-mass: one, voracious senseless growth, and the other: intelligent, sane effort toward a goal of better living.

I PONDERED that, remembering the Hitler threat which almost swept over the whole earth. It, too, had been

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growth at the expense of all other lives. Its opponent had been the co-operative lives of the world, who knew their only hope was in those forces which recognized their right to live in their own way in their own homes. Was anything different in this struggle but the outer shells? Was not the brain cell's growth but a repetition of World War II, minus the human bodies carrying the brain cells about?

Around us now a score of the great Master-cell beasts, vast synthesized mind cells of a single will and single individuality, had arranged themselves almost evenly. They formed great throbbing foci for the webs which seemed to accept their leadership, to attach to their tentacles ever more of the grey web fibers.

"How long will it take the Master cells to become the central ego of the mind-mass?" I asked Aurore, who sat brooding beside the telaug's weirdly abstract roar of meaning. She looked like a gigantic sibyl, a mountain of humanity, lovely and wise and inhuman in her aloof beauty.

"Who can say; they are so different from the wild mutated cells of the mind-mass. Perhaps hours, perhaps days, perhaps years. Perhaps never. No one could say certainly what such new types of organisms will do."

Pug was asleep in my arms, and over the grey webbed brow of the hill the sun shoved a blazing rim to peer at the scene of weird desolation, at the last despairing island of hope for man.

Shortly after the dawn brightened to day, the roar of a big plane's motors brought us to the river edge, to watch a big army bomber turn and bank and from its side plummeted down many small dark objects. Above the dark falling objects now blossomed great white flowers of fabric. Our visitors were parachuting into the "island of immunity" to look for the "Witch of the Andes." Or to find why on this one spot of all the Amazon's green jungle, no grey web of devouring mystery grew.

Aurore was sleeping now, watched over by a score of little squatting winged men, and Pug and I watched the descending parachutes alone. The little winged men glanced at them incuriously. Perhaps they didn't know what they were, did not realize what their advent meant to them. But I knew that now civilization had reached out, and that never again would Aurore and her weird new-created little people ever experiment with the future of man.

CHAPTER VI

Science Against the Mind-Mass

"Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life."

Byron "Manfred"

I WOKE Aurore, pointed up to the descending white flowers bearing their burdens nearer. "Comes what men call science to help you—or to hinder you. I thought you should be warned . . ."

"Ahhh! Men of the cities. Come to condemn me, to arrest me, perhaps to kill me. I fear them, I hate them, I will not have their interference!" She sprang to her feet, her blue eyes flashing, looking every bit the Goddess of nature prepared to face the destroying nemesis called civilization.

I tried to calm her: "Aurore, do not confess the thing is any fault of yours. Explain your work, point out that the mind-mass is an unpredictable sport,

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a mutation . . . They can help you. They are in no position to dictate to you, who understand the world's peril better than any other. Tell them what they need to know and nothing more if you can help it."

"Yes, yes, my friend indeed, you are. I need their help, as they need mine. There is not time for petty emotions. Yet I despise so much of their thought and their writings, as did my father. It is hard not to hate them for the progress they do not institute, they do not encourage. They are so many old dunderheads, my father always said, standing in the way of young new minds. But perhaps these are not that kind of scientists!"

We raced forward to help the first to land with his wind-blown billowing parachute. The big arms of Aurore swiftly folded up the great cloth. The man stood there, his mouth open with utter astonishment at sight of Aurore. We laughed, Pug and I and Aurore, and that laugh bound us in unity against the invasion of the minds of civilization. "They shall not dictate to us," was our mutual emotion, I felt.

"The Witch of the Andes!" exclaimed the astounded man. "Unbelievable! But, so is the Web of Death unbelievable."

I stuck out my hand, "Hawley of the SAFBI, and who are you?"

"Anders of Smithsonian. Could you brief me a bit on the nature of this island in the growth and what is going on here?"

He was a tall, gangling, middle-aged man; his hair silvered over the brown, and he was not particularly confident. While he shed his harness, the three of us were busy catching the other two, and chasing the dozen cases of supplies that followed them down. We returned from this work, breathless and excited, to find the three men drawn up in a line, solemn faced and uniformed, looking entirely too much like a military tribunal to suit me. I decided to delay their questions until we had felt them out a little.

"This is Pug Ranscom, daughter of the Chief of SAFBI, and my fiancée. And this, er, large friend, is a scientist of great ability, if unknown in accepted scientific circles, the daughter of Professor Nebski. Her growth is due to experiments of her father with growth hormones, almost an accident, as I understand."

"Where is Nebski?" asked Anders, a little sharply.

"He is dead of a snake bite. Now, before you sound off and ask a lot of questions, I'd better tell you that Aurore is boss here and understands more than any other person exactly what the trouble is and what to do about it. She will explain in her own way and in her own good time."

"TIME! Man, there is no time, the very lives of the cities of the world are in peril! This little expedition is almost the only hope of mankind! There must be no delay! Tell us at once what can be done about this growth!"

I looked at Aurore. She was studying the faces of the two men with Anders. I saw the question in her eyes, turned to Anders, asked: "Who are the other two with you? Aurore has no intention of telling criminals or unauthorized people anything. This could be used in criminal ways, you know!"

Anders snorted . . . "My God, man, there's no time for formalities. Within hours the grey stuff will cross the border into California, and start across the whole United States. The rate of growth is tremendous, you cannot realize here . . ."

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I turned to the telaug, switched on the sound. From the apparatus the weird sound meanings began to pour. From my experience with it I understood what it meant, and could visualize from it every mile of the extent of the mind-mass. It was like having eyes that could see a whole continent in one glance. But I saw that they did not understand the sound and abstract meaning impulses pouring from the speaker as well as from the coils of the device.

"That is the voice of the mind-mass, its individual summation of its all-sense. Can you understand what it means to listen to it? You had better humour Aurore. She created that device from necessity in a short time."

Anders seemed get the idea all at once. He approached Aurore, sitting now, disinterestedly brooding over the flow of weird meaning from the telaug, said: "Miss Nebski, we are accredited emissaries from the United States War Research Service. My companion here is Major George Merrick, specialist on biological warfare, and the other gentleman is Dr. Harold P. Yourey of the Office of Strategic Services, FBI. Here are our credentials. Anything you can do to aid us will be appreciated by the Nation we represent."

Aurore did not smile, but she did look over the papers and cards he handed her. "Very well," she said at last, her huge voice easily dominating the whole scene, setting the tone, announcing to every sense just who was dominant here, "I will tell you what will be of use to you, and you can form your own opinion. But I warn you that the first sign of antagonism or accusation on your part may be fatal. I am not alone here."

I followed as Aurore showed them her vats and tubes of synthetic determinants, explained the whole process of life-creation. It was an intense session of questions and unbelieving stares on their part until the overwhelming evidence of the truth covered their incredulity with conviction. I listened as she pointed out the great grey mounds of the Master cells she had created, as she explained the nature of the little winged men, even invited the winged little men to participate in the discussion. It was an amazing revelation of the poverty of organized science before the genius of the synthetic human. Aurore was supreme, and their minds stumbled along trying to understand and evaluate the information, the formulas and processes she threw at them with the ease of the super-expert, the specialist in electro-biology. They were galvanized by the revelation that the growth and movement of the mind-mass could be checked and held by a beam of neural-wave frequency thrown by an adapted radio-transmitter.

SOON after she had completed her explanation, the three men set up a cable pick-up with harness. The big plane, hovering still high overhead, swooped low, dropped a hook and cable which snatched aloft Anders in an ingenious seat harness. Back toward the United States went a method of fighting or at least checking the mind-mass. If it was feasible, there was hope now, I reasoned. But perhaps the mind-mass was so powerful now it could overcome the super-imposed neural-wave flows from the transmitter beams. Perhaps the method that had worked when the mind-mass was small would no longer prove of much use against it.

That night we sat around the radio, tuned to the United States broadcasts, listening to the newsmen ballyhoo the return of the scientist from the "Island of Immunity."

The rapid-fire, exciting voice of Jay

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Court staccatoed: "The army came through today on the problem of what to do about the Grey Web of Death that threatens to wipe man off the earth. Dropping three scientists upon the lately discovered island of immunity at the center of the web, the army a few hours later responded to signals from the island and picked up one of the scientists with a chair hook, a technique used where landing is impossible.

"Prof. Anders of Smithsonian was the man plucked from the heart of the web, and he brought back with him the most startling news to strike the people of this country since the threat of the Grey Web was first fully realized and counter-action taken.

"In that island of immunity Anders found the Witch of the Andes, who was thought to be but a superstition! He says she is but a child in years, but of an amazing growth, fully twenty feet in height, and with a brain as astoundingly powerful as her body is huge! She had used a particular radio-wave to halt the spread of the plague across her island of green, and Anders has brought back her method with him. Which to me personally is some great relief! How about you, eh, folks? More about the people on this most amazing island of green in the center of the Web of Death, and the heroic trio found there, as soon as we get details from Prof. Anders. Right now the army is keeping him pretty busy planning the defense of your home and mine."

I turned to Pug, saw tears in her eyes. I put an arm around her shoulder. "Maybe soon you and I will have one of those homes they are protecting, Pug."

"I'll believe it when I see it," she muttered between her teeth, but she kissed me, nevertheless, and laughed a little with relief.

FOR several days we did little but listen to the radio reports and rest; we were worn out, and the two scientists took up a lot of Aurore's time with complicated questions.

The defense barrier erected clear across Mexico, a series of beam towers to hold back the growth, worked all right. The growth stopped, and remained quiescent within the range of the revolving beams. But everywhere else the tide went on and on; it crawled upon ships, invading the wood unseen; crossed the oceans, turned up in Europe, in China, in Russia . . . It was like holding back the sea with a broom. Everywhere man was retreating before the grey deadly tide.

The two men, Yourey and Merrick, began to entreat Aurore to accompany them to New York or Washington, anywhere where there were proper research facilities, to give her immense knowledge of bio-electrics to the battle for the life of man. Her own efforts, I realized now, were hampered by lack of equipment, and even more hampered by lack of stimulating mental contacts with minds equipped to talk over her problem. She turned from her tubes, her distillings of glandular extracts, her continual creation of new types and organizations of mental cells, finally, and gave her assent.

Yourey at once sent the message over the short wave for a plane to pick them up.

They sent an amphibious job, a huge one, for they had no idea of Aurore's true weight. It was many times a normal human's weight, and she did not know herself.

The ship landed perilously on the stream, dwarfing the banks with its huge size, and nearly being wrecked as it scraped a bar in the stream. But she made it back into the air, skimming the grey shrouded trees for miles as

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the pilot fought for altitude.

In Washington, Pug and I bade the giant girl good-bye. She nearly refused to part with us, she considered us her only trustworthy friends, but we promised to see her every day. It was the first real show of genuine emotion I had ever seen in her.

Weeks passed, and the governments of the world were quietly giving up the ghost, the route of mankind everywhere before the steadily advancing grey webs was complete. The neural wave-length barriers had been only temporarily successful.

Every evening Pug and I went to the underground Army laboratories to talk to Aurore. We were practically ordered to, anyway, as it kept up her morale. She would recount to us all the many secret reports of the activities of the United States forces against the enveloping death, and their own efforts in the laboratories to find a remedy for the run-away growth.

The commerce of the world was at a standstill; ships could not move because of floating masses of the growth which could contaminate the ships, bring them into port, start the infection where had been none before.

Starvation, famine, disease began to rise higher, civilization tottered.

Many of the less settled portions of the globe were shorn clean of all life except the dread grey blanket. Each night Pug and I with Aurore listened to the telaug, which could pick up the thought of the mind-mass at great distances now that the augmentative steps had been strengthened.

Through the meaningless, unorganized mass-thought of the mass of cells cut the great voice of the Master cells, and they knew we were listening, spoke to us by name from their shapeless mounds of life on the slopes of the Andes!

Other researchers had found a corrosive gas which destroyed the growth, and were busily fitting out the army planes with gas sprays. With these, vast areas could be cleaned of the growth, but the thing could not be definitely defeated. It was like trying to spray the whole continent of Africa with DDT. The world was too big!

This night, Aurore said—"Come with me. I have developed a parasite which I think will conquer. There is but one drawback. It may be able to live in the body of man, and if so, it will prove an even bigger danger. Tonight I take the last step—to find out if it can live in a human body, in my body!"

Pug looked aghast. "Oh, no, Aurore. Not you!"

"Who else? The plague is my fault."

We followed her into the underground labyrinth where the great Army research laboratories are hidden. There in her own private rooms she showed us the culture, seething tubes of little, just visible animals.

"PUT the telaug on them, and you will see what I mean . . ." Aurore said to me.

I did as she asked, swung the receptive loops of her telaug receiver toward the tubes of living pink fluid, switched on the power. From the speaker, and from the brain impulse sender came the mentally audible sound of . . . Voices! Human voices, human-like thoughts!

Lovely, a symphony of reason, organized and highly active, that sound and that abstract meaning were like looking into an alien world of beautiful people.

"These will replace the grey menace, the webs will disappear, the pink and intelligent cells will devour them, find a way to exist unseen beneath soil, in the rocks, wherever the runaway cells have found a way to live, these will

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follow to the death and replace them. I have succeeded. There remains yet to make sure whether they can be malignant, whether they will also devour the cells of the human and replace them . . ."

"Ask them first, Aurore. There must be a way to make such creatures understand what you are going to do. They must understand first, then I am sure that such minds as those we hear would co-operate." I was not anxious to see Aurore collapse and become a writhing pink mass of germ-like creatures, through another error.

"There is no other way. Do you think I do not know what I am doing? It must be ignorant of what is to happen. If it knew, it might withhold attack, and then when released and growing over the earth, it would later attack humans because it was ignorant of the necessity not to do so."

Aurore did not listen to our entreaties, but picked up a huge syringe full of the pink fluid, injected it into her great arm as we watched.

That was an agonizing waiting, to see what the effect would be. I kept the telaug on the spot on her arm where the pink, new life forms had entered, listened to the confused involuntary voice of the cells, which no man can wholly understand, and singled out the peculiar alien minute strains of the new pink cell life. They were at first a confused medley of anxiety, changing to a paean of effort as they struggled for life within her flesh. Gradually the voices grew weaker, and I read aright the cry that was their death cry—"Air, we must have air."

"Unlike the grey webs of the mutated mind-cells, they cannot live without oxygen in large amounts. They cannot get enough within the human body. That is what I had to prove." Aurore's face was covered with a fine dew of sweat, I realized it had been an ordeal for her.

"It was the quickest way to know. I was pretty sure, but I had to know, of course." Aurore smiled at me, touched my shoulder with her great finger-tips. "The peril for mankind is over, and if this pink strange life-form develops as I know it will, the plans of my father to make the world a place of magic will come true."

THE army staff went to work culturing the new microbe, for which they had no name or classification, it being entirely a product of Aurore's use of Nebski's methods of synthesizing new life-forms from protoplasm. Then over the world went the fleets of war-planes, dropping not bombs, but a pink cloud of mist upon the grey deadly mass of mind-matter that did not think, but only grew greater.

The day that Pug and I were married, the radios were blaring the news of man's release from fear, and a victory celebration thronged every street of the capital.

The last time I saw Aurore, she was busy with sets of projection drawings for her great new vats in the Army's laboratories, now hers by right of conquest. There were no signs of her being displaced as first lady of research anyway.

I watched her for awhile, then I asked: "Now what could it be, I can't quite make out. Adonis, or Superman, or just a giant to do the handy work around here?"

Aurore gave me her best glittering smile, and shook the tawny flood of hair from a face that blushed a rich embarrassed hue of red.

"I am making myself a husband; you are married now to Pug. Besides you would not want to live with such a huge woman as myself, would you?"

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I declined committing myself, for it might get back to Pug. And you know how wives are. Or do you?

There is one great thing I have learned from Aurore's work. Aurore was right when she decided that the world needed more and better thought.

I prophesy that when men learn at last of the surviving creations of that giant lone genius, of the winged men, of the water race, of the winged minds of the air—they will learn that the logic of perfect thought is the tie that gives union to all life, and not nationalistic or race vauntings. They will learn that all thinking creatures are kin, if they think well and correctly. And as Aurore grimly prophesied, so do I: if they do not learn that, they will perish before a more benign form of life.

THE END

REPORTS FROM THE IONOSPHERE

By FRAN FERRIS

AT White Sands, New Mexico, scientists are busy finding out more things about the air high above the earth. Rockets with thermometers and other instruments sealed inside them are sent whizzing up into space. When the rockets fall back to the earth their instruments show how fast they went and the temperatures of the layers of air through which the rocket passed. Some of these layers are hot and some are 80 degrees below zero. Seventy miles is as high as any of the rockets have gone so far, but scientists are working on a rocket that will go much higher.

At the earth's surface the atmosphere is much heavier because it is pressed down by the weight of the air above it. At sea level, the air pressure will push up the mercury in a barometer 29.92 inches. At 20,000 feet above the earth, the air pressure will raise the mercury only 13.75 inches.

The atmosphere itself is divided into spheres. The troposphere starts at sea level. At about 40,000 feet above the earth is the tropopause. There, the troposphere meets the stratosphere. In the low pressure of the stratosphere, a person's blood would boil away unless he were sealed in a cabin with higher air pressure. Above the stratosphere is the ozonosphere and above that is the ionosphere, from which rockets are now bringing us reports.

SHINTOISM, THE WAY OF THE GODS

By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

THE history of this religion falls into three periods, the first ending in the sixth century A.D., and the second in the eighteenth century, and the third continuing at the present time. In the first period the religion was not named, and had no dogmas, moral precepts, or sacred writings. The objects of worship were called "kami" meaning superior. Some gods were good and some were bad, some were mortal, and some were wedded to women. From one of this later class descended the Emperor. But there were dieties of the cauldron, kettle and saucepan, gods of the kitchen and of the gate as well as gods of pestilence, storms and heavens. Everything was worshipped that excited fear or admiration. The rites were purification by water from crimes, and the offerings were of most anything of value such as swords and armor, and especially cloth which was cut in strips and hung before the shrines.

The second period began with the sixth century and the advent of Buddhism and Chinese civilization. Shinotism stepped into the background and its gods were regarded as reincarnations of Buddha. Buddhists priests took over the shrines and introduced their own ornaments and rituals. Only in the palace of their emperors, who were themselves Buddhists, and at a few of the great shrines were attempts made to keep any of the ancient usages. The Shinto priests became fortune tellers and magicians.

In the eighteenth century a succession of scholars animated by the love of antiquity and hating any false or foreign beliefs, attacked Buddhism and Confusianism and fought to reëstablish Shintoism. They taught that its basis was obedience to nature and to the Emperor. Although Shinto was shadowy and ill-defined, sentiment was aroused and after some revolutions about 1865, Buddhism was disestablished and Shinto was put in its place, but it could not maintain itself and became only a code of ceremonies for court and officials.

* * *

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Dale stared in fascination at the string. It seemed vibrant, as if it were alive . . .

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. . . a knotted string

by Berkeley Livingston

DALE HERRICK was the richest man in the world. Everybody said so. There wasn't the slightest doubt in anyone's mind that this was an indisputable fact. Like the sun, and having to get up for work, and of course, death and taxes.

The announcer had just verified the fact:

"The three month old strike at the far-flung factories of the Herrick Enterprises has just been settled. A spokesman for the company has announced that the union terms have been met and that work will be resumed as quickly as the men can get back.

"And now we will resume the program interrupted. . . ."

Dale Herrick twisted viciously at the knob of the small portable radio. But he twisted the wrong way. It blared louder. Muttering an imprecation, Herrick picked the set up and flung it from him. It landed with a satisfying splash into the foam-crested water.

There it was, Herrick thought savagely. Something vital which had taken place. Something in which he should have taken a leading role. Damn it! Wasn't he the owner, wasn't he the man behind the scenes, the one to whom his father had left all this? What was it Benson had said only the other night?

"My boy. Your father left you an inheritance of twenty millions of dollars a year. And a three *billion* dollar fortune. Pretty good for a young man of twenty-six!"

Yeah, Herrick thought. Pretty good. It might as well have been three cents!

It was a curious length of string,

with knots that vanished—and reappeared

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What with a dozen administrators of the estate, and another dozen legalistic twists to the will, the handling of the Herrick empire had been taken completely out of Dale's hands. It was the way his father had planned.

He had said so. Dale was to be a sort of emperor. The recipient of the vast labors which put the millions into the Herrick coffers. And Dale gagged at the thought. Like the business of his father's having chosen the woman he was to marry.

Martha Wethered! Good heavens! A female jellyfish poured into badly fitting and terribly expensive clothes. From a fine old family, his father had said when he made the choice. Bear you sons that will show breeding. Why hadn't his father picked a *fine old piece* of Chippendale, or Old American pewter? Dale laughed aloud at the thought of having a son who would undoubtedly be referred to as an excellent example of Old American and Modern. It was furniture he was to beget, not children.

HE ROLLED over and sat up. A puzzled frown creased his forehead as his gaze took in the figure of a man seated on the rocky promontory to his left. He hadn't been there when Dale came down for his sun bath. Nor could Dale account for the fact of his being here at all. This whole stretch of sea wall and beach was private ground, belonging to the Herrick estate. But, however he got here, he was here.

Dale clambered onto the rock and stretched his tall, lean though well-knit figure beside the other. The stranger was fishing, though it was a matter of conjecture as to whether it could be called fishing. A bamboo rod and cotton twine are not the best equipment for ocean fishing.

The stranger turned his head and bestowed a benevolent smile on the young man who had come up to join him.

"Any luck?" Dale asked politely.

The stranger carefully set his rod into a hollow, turned bright blue eyes on Dale and said:

"I don't know, yet. Been swimming?"

"Uh huh. By the way, mind telling me how you got in here?" Dale asked.

The stranger was agreeable.

"Walkin' down the road a piece," he said, "and came to an open part of the wall. Saw the ocean. Shucks! Wa'n't much to it. Just stepped through and here I be."

"Just stepped through and here I be," Dale said in a low voice. How simple it was. All one had to do was find a hole in the wall and step through.

"That's right," the stranger said.

"Huh?" Dale's eyes went wide. The man had read his mind!

"Just stepped through and here I be," the man said. The smile in his eyes spread to his lips. In fact his whole smooth, round, seamless face seemed to be smiling.

He *was* a peculiar-looking man, Dale thought. Most of these natives had a sour look to their faces—as if the narrowness of their lives had left an indelible print on their faces. But this man's was so open, so easy to read. There was nothing of meanness in it, or narrowness or bitterness. It was so *benevolent* looking, so frank. One forgot the worn jeans and faded checkered shirt and scuffed shoes.

"Funny thing," the stranger continued. "Makes me think of life, that wall. Most humans just never look for a break in the wall. Just satisfied, I guess, to stay behind it and never see what's around to be seen. Maybe the grass ain't greener or the gals prettier, but heck! Don't hurt none to look."

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The stranger turned his face to the sea and looked broodingly out at the grey-green swelling of water. When he turned back to Dale, the eyes had recovered their smile.

"Y'know," he went on, "life's like a piece of knotted string. We crawl along that string till we come to a knot. Some crawl over the knot, others stop. A few get to the end of the knotted part. Only a few. Them's the ones what get to know what life's for. Look!"

HE PULLED his right hand from his pocket and held it palm open, toward Dale. There was a piece of string in it.

"See that?" the stranger asked. "That's what I mean. I keep it with me all the time, cause it makes me think of life. Whenever I come to something that's too hard to get over, I take out one of the knots. Surprising how the problems get solved."

That's wonderful, Dale thought. For him! What problems could he have? Dale centered his attention on the string. He didn't see any knots.

"Just undid the last one," the stranger said in answer to Dale's query.

"You mean you had a problem when you came here?" Dale asked.

"Yep! Fishing. I think I've made a strike," the stranger said.

There was a flurry of activity at the end of the line. The pole, wedged deep in the fissure, was arching as though there was something heavy at the end of it. Quickly, the stranger lifted it and began a slow fight for the fish he had caught. Dale watched in breathless excitement. Gradually, through the skill and infinite patience of the fisherman, the fish, a large sea bass, was brought into the sand. And suddenly the stranger laughed, slacked the pull of the reel, and let the bass escape.

"Why did you do that?" Dale asked.

"Son," the stranger said, "it's the fight that's interesting, not the catch. Like the business with the knots. They're not on the string, as you saw. I put one there when I come to a problem. Then I put my mind to the problem . . ."

"Then?"

"Here! Take it!" the stranger said, handing the string to Dale.

Dale looked down at it in his palm. It was just an ordinary piece of twine, about twelve inches in length. As the old man pointed out there wasn't a single knot on its length. Dale looked up and was surprised to see that the old man was gone.

He stared for a bewildered second at the spot where the stranger had stood. Then he climbed to the top of the rock. And he saw the white thatch of the old man's hair, like a ball of snow-white cotton set above the dark, checkered shirt. He was beyond hearing unless Dale shouted. And Dale knew that he wasn't going to shout. Then he passed from view.

Dale walked back to the summer cottage, a look of deep thought on his face. The piece of string dangled from the ends of his fingers.

DALE HERRICK looked about him, eyes bright and eager. He felt like some adventurer from out of one of the best-selling novels. He felt a deep self-satisfaction at what he'd done. The tiny circle that had been his life had been broken. And of his own volition and with his own will. Now he was entering a new life, a strange one, away from everything and everyone, in which his roots lay.

He looked up at the street marker. The legend read, Clark on one side and Van Buren on the other. He walked east on Van Buren. Everything inter-

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ested him. The crowds, the stores, the wares they displayed, everything.

He stopped before a liquor store. The odd-looking bottles held his attention. He had been to many of the countries from which the whiskies and liquers came. He turned, and bumped squarely into a short, heavy man whose face was singular for the look of blank stolidity it bore. The man mumbled something and moved away. Dale smiled politely, murmured, "Excuse me." But the other only continued to walk. Dale shrugged his shoulders and continued his stroll, in an opposite direction from the other's.

He stopped next at a tavern only a few doors from the liquor store. A huge roast of beef stood on display in one of the windows. Dale felt saliva collect in his mouth. He hadn't eaten more than a sandwich and coffee during the whole of the bus trip from New York. The roast tempted his appetite.

There was one other customer at the steam counter. Dale waited politely for the man to order.

"How's the beef, Charley?" the man asked.

Charley, a tall, heavy-set man, removed a blackened pipe from his lips, looked down at the customer and said with more than a trace of irony in his voice:

"How's the roast beef! How long have you been eating here, Jim? D'ja ever know me to carry anything but the best? Why, my beef's the best in Chicago. Now how about a little macaroni with it, huh? Pickle?"

And all the while Charley heaped the plate full of food.

The customer grinned and watched the other. When the plate was full, Charley passed it across the counter and said:

"That'll be sixty-five, Jim."

"I, I think I'll have the same," Dale said.

"Yessir. The best in town," Charley reiterated.

Dale fished in his pocket for the change. He had exactly enough. In the inside breast pocket of his jacket was his wallet. A thousand dollars in tens were in the wallet. Dale had made sure he'd have enough for any emergency which might come up.

There were some eight or nine tables shoved against the tile wall. They were all either taken up with diners or almost so. The bar which adjoined the steam counter had a full complement of men sitting along its length. Dale chose a table at which only two others were seated.

The beef was good, and the coffee fair. Dale munched at the food with only half his attention on it. The other half was on the two who were his table mates.

They were an odd pair.

One was extremely tall and the other was shorter than average. They were both dining on similar dishes, pork shanks. And at their elbows stood *two* immense schooners of beer. Dale's eyes widened when he saw each man lift the huge container and quaff half the contents at a single gulp. Then they'd dig into the shanks.

And as they'd take their gargantuan drink, they'd say:

"To Moe, to Joe and to Charleyo."

The fourth toast and the schooners were emptied.

They smacked their lips simultaneously and slammed the heavy glasses down on the table and as one looked at Dale.

DALE let his eyes fall under their frank appraisal. He fished for the pack of cigarettes in his pocket, pulled it out and took one. On a sudden impulse he handed the pack to the others.

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The tall one took the pack, extracted a cigarette, handed the pack to his friend who also took one, and returned it to Dale, saying:

"Many thanks, friend. The weed is most satisfying after the gut is full."

Dale smiled politely and said, "Quite all right. If you don't mind my asking, what was that little rhyme you sang? I mean why did you sing it?"

He wondered why he had asked what he did. Suddenly he realized that he had given way to curiosity, a something which in ordinary circumstances he would have never done.

"Moe, Joe, Charleyo?" the tall one asked.

Dale nodded his head.

The tall man smiled. His teeth hadn't seen a dentist in a long time.

"Well, Moe is the guy that has Moe's Mansion. That's the place where we stay. He's letting us run up a bill. Joe's the book around here. He gave us the dough for the meal. Charley's the guy that owns this place. The beer was on him. Simple, no?"

"Simple yes," Dale said in agreement. "But, er, if it isn't too personal, don't you have any money?"

"It's not too personal. And we don't have any. On account of we don't believe in work. That's why they call me, Allergic Algernon. And this is Mooley, my buddy."

Dale's teeth flashed in a grin. What names! Allergic Algernon and Mooley. The tall man was grinning down at him in the most friendly fashion. The one called Mooey also grinned. But only after he had looked to his tall friend to see whether it was all right.

"Mind if I buy you both a drink?" Dale asked.

He suddenly knew that he liked these two. More than he had ever liked any of his friends or acquaintances. They seemed to be humans, not animated checkbooks, like the rest whom he knew.

Broad smiles of pleasure lighted the faces of the two men seated across from him. The smiles were answer enough. Dale stood and reached for his wallet, remembering that he had used the last of his change for lunch.

They saw him go pale, saw the hand rummage deeper, more furiously in the pocket and at last come out, empty.

"'Smatter?" asked the tall one. "Lost your dough?"

Dale's grin was one of those be-brave things.

His features went tense in the manner of those in the throes of decision. The damned wallet had to be somewhere. He remembered that he had purchased something in the town which had been the stop before the bus reached Chicago. He had spent the whole of a ten-dollar bill. His wallet had been on his person then. His hands went through all his pockets. Nothing.

"But, but," Dale said helplessly. "I had it when I, when I . . ."

"Were you in a crowd somewhere?" the tall man asked.

"N-no." Suddenly Dale remembered where he'd seen the man who had bumped him in front of the liquor store. He'd also stopped off at the same place . . . Hell! He was a fellow passenger on the bus. He'd seen Dale take out the wallet and had probably seen the huge wad of tens.

"Guess I lost it," Dale said lamely.

"More likely some dip made you," was the more realistic opinion of the tall man.

"Yeah," Dale said sadly. "Guess so."

"All the dough you had, eh? Tough. Anything we c'n do . . .?"

WELL, thought Dale, his adventure hadn't lasted long. Now he had to wire for more. That would let the

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dozen and one people who were the administrators of the estate know where he was, the last thing he wanted. His fingers had been idly playing in his jacket pocket. There was something wrapped around them. He pulled his hand free and looked to see what there was in it.

The piece of string. And there was a knot almost at the very end.

And as though they had been spoken aloud, the words of the old fisherman came to him:

". . . They're not on the string . . . I put one there . . . Then I solve the problem . . ."

So that was it. His fingers had tied a knot in the string. Because he had a problem? Dale put the thought from him. It was too fantastic. But the knot was there. Then call it a problem. Like the one facing him. Damn the administrators! He was going to live his own life.

Turning abruptly to the two men watching him he shot out:

"This Moe, do you know him well?"

"Like a brother," Allergic Algernon said. "Why?"

"I'm strapped," Dale replied. "And I've got to stay some place till I get a job. Mind taking me to him?"

"Come along, young feller," the tall man said.

The tall one and his shorter companion stood on either side of Dale. Behind the waist-high desk a short, balding man looked bleakly at the three.

"So!" he said in a rasping voice. "So! The two of you ain't enough. You got to bring me business from off the street. I got to furnish rooms for all your friends too. What's your name?"

"Dale Her . . . Harris," Dale corrected himself hastily.

"Y'don't look like the usual run that come in here," Moe said.

Dale only smiled. "Like I say," he said, "I'm going to get a job. I'll pay you out of my first week's pay."

"And you don't sound like the rest," Moe said. "Why some of these guys . . . Hell! Ain't no use cryin' after all these years."

A sour grimace crossed his face, he burped suddenly and smiled happily.

"Had to get rid of that. These guys will show you to your room. See you on pay day. 'Bye."

The tall one and his short partner sat on the bed. Dale had the only chair in the room, a relic from the days when Moe attended auction sales. The two new-found friends regarded Dale owlishly.

"And now what are your intentions?" Allergic Allgernon asked.

"Get a job somewhere," Dale replied.

"Got an idea where?"

"Nope."

"Then it's up to us to help you out," the tall man said.

Dale said, "How come? Why this interest in me?"

Allergic Algernon shrugged his shoulders, a gesture which Mooley followed, as he did all else his friend did.

"Does there have to be a reason for everything?" he asked.

Dale was silent to that. It was the first he'd ever heard of anyone doing anything for the sheer desire to do good.

Allergic Algernon went on. "Now we got a friend. Perfessor Pokestitch. He's got some kind of laboratory down on the near north side. And he was tellin' us the other night that he needs an assistant. Maybe . . ."

"Is he there now?" Dale asked.

"Let's go, Mooley," the tall man said, arising and motioning for his friend to follow.

"WHAT'S the matter, can't he talk?" Dale asked as he walked with the oddly assorted pair. Mooley

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walked a few paces behind Dale and the other. "I'd swear I heard him singing that silly ditty with you."

"I taught him to sing it," Allergic Algernon explained. "He ain't quite right up here," he gestured toward his head. "But someone's got to take care of the poor cuss. And he ain't a bad guy. Funny thing about him. He don't feel pain."

"He what?" Dale asked in amazement.

"Feel pain. Shucks! I've seen him get smacked over the head with one of those heavy beer steins, over at Charley's place, and never faze the guy."

Dale stole a look at Mooley. He looked all right as far as he could see. Then again, that odd light, that look of not being aware of things could mean what the tall man said, that he was a little off in his bearings.

"How much further?" Dale asked as the blocks went by and the human bean pole kept his tireless pace. Dale was getting a bit tired.

"Just around the next corner," Allergic Algernon said. "And here we are."

Dale looked up at the two-storied brownstone mansion. His lips pursed in surprise. This Professor Pokestitch, what a name, was on a higher level of financial stability than the two with Dale.

To Dale's surprise, Algernon walked into an areaway to the right of the building. It led to a garage in the rear. The garage proved to be the headquarters and laboratory of the professor. Algernon opened the door without troubling to knock.

They were greeted by an odor so offensive, so powerfully breath-stifling Dale stopped involuntarily. But the two with him only sniffed loudly twice and continued on. Dale had to follow, no matter what the dictates of his nose.

It was an amazing room. Strange looking balls, and retorts of glass took up most of the space. Algernon with Mooley at his heels proceeded past the array of glassware and to a far corner where stood an old-fashioned desk, behind which, and shoved almost to the wall by lack of space, was seated the man they'd come to see.

He hadn't noticed their entrance. Dale doubted that he would have noticed anything less than the explosion of an atom bomb. He was engrossed in what was apparently a complicated mathematical problem from the amount of papers filled with figures that lay in front of him.

Dale gave his future employer a careful appraisal. It was obvious that Pokestitch cared nothing for the formality of dress. He was wearing a shirt that resembled— Dale looked more carefully and saw it *was* a nightshirt. He had a full thatch of thick oily-looking hair which rose from a high forehead to fall in curling unkemptness around the soiled neck of the nightshirt. It was obvious that scientific matters had taken precedence over the daily shave. Five o'clock shadow had lengthened to week-old darkness. Dale couldn't see the man's face, but the rest of the body held little hope for normalcy. Pokestitch could have served for a model of "a rag, a bone, and hank of hair."

Algernon cleared his throat, an action followed by his stooge. The man at the desk frowned but didn't look up.

"Perfessor," Algernon began hesitantly. "Take a gander at what I brung ya," the bean pole said more loudly.

THE man looked away from the problem before him. And Dale received a distinct shock as he met the strange eyes of the disheveled Pokestitch. Lunacy or genius was to be defined in their depths. But this man

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would never know the inanities of normal life.

"Ya-as?" Pokestitch's voice had a habit of rising on the second syllable. "Ya-as? Oh! It's you. What day is this?"

"Tuesday. Look, perfessor. I brung you an assistant."

Pokestitch's slightly blank look passed over Dale and came to rest on Mooley.

"Not your hyperthyroid friend?"

"Mooley?" Algernon was amused. His laughter subsiding, he continued, "Nah. This guy. Name's Harris. Needs a job, bad. An' I thought of you, right away."

"Tuesday, eh," Pokestitch's quick change of subject made Dale do a double-take. "Good! The X retort should show signs of coalescence. What about it?"

"The X retort?" Algernon asked.

"Your friend, where is he?"

"Right in front of you," Algernon said fretfully.

"Ah, ya-es. Nice looking fella. Needs a job, eh? Hope he finds one. Odd thing. Find I'm hungry. H'm . . ."

"Perfessor!" Algernon sounded aghast. "When did ya eat last?"

"What day is this?"

"Tuesday."

Dale marveled at the patience of the tall man.

"Good! The X retort . . ."

"We know! It should be ready. But first, give me a buck and I'll trot out and get you some food. Y'know. The stuff that makes for living."

Pokestitch tried the pocket of his nightshirt. Nothing. His hands shoved aside the papers on the desk with reckless abandon. And brought to light an amazing collection of money. It lay scattered about the desk, several thousand dollars in all kinds of denominations, under a multitude of scratch papers. Dale marveled that a man could be so unaware of reality.

Pokestitch picked up several of the bills and shoved them into Algernon's hand. The bean pole looked at them and whistled.

"Holy cats! What d'ya want me to do, buy a restaurant? These are C notes, perfessor."

"Ah! Is that good? Or do you need more? If so just take as much as you want."

"Look, Pokey! Ain't you got nothing smaller?" Algernon asked.

At this point Dale decided to take over. Reaching past the hunched shoulders of the man at the desk, Dale found a couple of singles and handed them to Algernon. The tall man grinned, turned and marched to the door, saying:

"Be back in a few minutes. One of those burger joints should be open on State Street."

The rather heavy, flaccid features of Pokestitch twitched in a grimace which was their interpretation of a smile.

"I like that, young fellow," he said to Dale. "Initiative. It's the prime requisite I require in an assistant. I don't know whether or not you're working, but if not I'd consider it a privilege if you'd come to work for me."

Dale shook his head in wonder. This man was the prototype of all the absent-minded professors. He rather liked the coot, though. And found it a startling thing that he *could* like a person or thing. All his life had been plotted out. The matter of personal likes or dislikes had never entered into the choice made for him.

"Of course I would," he said.

"Done. Now then have you any knowledge of physics? Or chemistry . . . But, pshaw! That isn't necessary. I need you to keep my affairs in shape. Be a sort of man Friday to me.

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Think you can?"

IF OLD Benson could have only been here, Dale thought. The Herrick heir a servant. And to someone like this Pokestitch. Well, he had wanted a job. That was one problem solved. Suddenly he thought of the string. He looked at it. It was as unwrinkled as the day he got it. A chill chased itself down his back.

"Yes," Dale said, ridding himself of the strange thought. "And I might as well start now."

Algernon came in at that precise instant, making it easy for Dale to chase the professor from the paper-strewn desk. While Mooley, Algernon and Pokestitch found a large empty crate on which they placed the hamburgers the big fellow had brought, Dale began the sorting of papers.

Pokestitch kept no files so Dale had to use a simple arrangement of putting the papers in order. He placed all the bills in one heap, all the personal mail in another, and in a third, business correspondence. It was in the third category that he discovered something of interest.

Pokestitch was being subsidized by a competitor of the Herrick Industries.

Simple curiosity made him read the letter which had attracted his attention. When he finished reading he placed the letter on the top of the heap of correspondence, so that it could be instantly reached. Then he completed the task of setting the desk straight. By that time the three men had finished their meal.

"Look, Dale," Algernon said in apologetic tones. "Me and Mooley got to lam out now. The scratch is short and we got to make with the mooch."

"Will I see you later?" Dale asked.

"Sure. We're through around ten. Drop in at the Tea Shop. Y'know, Charley's place."

Pokestitch had forgotten Dale's presence. He had stepped to the side of an immense retort filled with a milky-white substance. For a second the figure of the scientist seemed to lengthen, broaden, take on an air of power beyond that of the insignificant body. Then Pokestitch turned and the impression was gone. It was the same disheveled man Dale had seen hunched over the desk. Only the smile that illuminated the countenance showed something of what lay deeper, somewhere in the soul of the man.

Pokestitch said in a gentle, far-away voice:

"The purest of all science, research. All else is dross. Twenty-five years, my boy, and now this. Within this tube, this glass sheathing, this shell, pulses the most powerful force man has ever conceived."

Dale gawked open-mouthed. This wasn't the man who hadn't been able to utter two phrases which bore on each other.

"The sputum of the universe. The energy thrown out by a million suns, harnessed and made volatile. The life force, the soul, all that makes man master, is in this retort. And I discovered it," Pokestitch went on in that voice which held at one and the same time, humility and pride.

"But what is it?" Dale asked.

"Energy incarnate," Pokestitch replied. "The beginning of the atom, the beginning of everything."

The man was either mad or the greatest genius the world had ever known, Dale thought. But mad or otherwise, there was something about the man that told Dale he was beyond the common desires and ambitions of ordinary man. Then what had the Dox Company to do with him? It was a puzzle Dale vowed to solve.

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"I've set your desk aright," Dale said. "Is there anything else you'd like for me to do?"

Pokestitch looked at him, blankly.

"Desk?" The light of reason and remembrance came back to him. "Oh! Why, no. Nothing that I can think of, now. Uh, wait! There is something. I must have you with me at all times. Can you move in here?"

"I guess so," Dale said, surprised at the question.

"Good. I suppose you have your bags somewhere. Bring them back with you. And make it about midnight. I have someone coming in then to see me and I'll want you around."

Dale flushed as he said, "Mind if I ask for a small advance? You see . . ."

"Advance? Oh. Go right ahead, The money's somewhere, I suppose. Take whatever you need."

Dale slipped three tens in his pocket, bid the scientist a good-night, and left. His watch told him he had two hours to wait for the return of Allergic Algernon and his friend. Dale was surprised at the lateness of the hour. Time had literally flown by.

He retraced his footsteps until he arrived in the Loop. A news reel theatre's display of its features made him stop. A neon sign on the marquee told him that the show lasted an hour and a half, long enough to make the time worth passing. He bought a ticket and went in.

THEY were waiting for him at the same table. And from the flushed appearance of the tall man, their efforts to get money had not been in vain. As evidence, the tall, empty steins showed that they had been able to pay for the drinks. Dale gathered that Charley's invitations to drink on the house came few and far between.

Algernon welcomed Dale with open arms and mouth.

"Ah! There's my chum, now. Have a drink."

Dale refused smilingly, but did sit down.

"No? You don't mind if we have another? Good. *Harry!* Three beers!" Algernon shouted without pausing to take breath, and without waiting for an answer to his question.

A short, dark-skinned man, with an immense, red-veined nose, came from behind the bar, three of the immense steins of beer held in one hand. He slapped them down on the table and said in a bored voice, "Thirty cents."

"Of course and exactly, Harry. The human adding machine. Three times ten. Thirty cents. Never fails. Always hits the register on the head. Thirty cents is right. The only thing . . ."

"Is that I want thirty cents," Harry said, his hand reaching for the steins.

"Of course," Algernon said, his voice a little less ebullient, "thirty cents. Er, Harry . . ."

"Look, Allergic," the bored voice of the bartender broke in. "You know the rules of the house. Nothing on the cuff, without Charley's okay."

"But we've already spent four dollars, Harry. Doesn't that entitle us to a free one?"

"See Charley," Harry said. He started to lift the steins, and Dale dropped a half dollar on the table top.

Harry pocketed the coin, made change from his own pocket, all with the same blank expression, and retrieved the empty steins.

Algernon's grin was as bright as ever, but there was a hint of regret in his eyes.

"Shouldn't have done that," he said. "Hell! I'd have gotten some free beer outa him. He always comes across. After I let him think it's an honor or something to be waited on by him."

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Dale perched himself on the stool and regarded the two mooches with an intent expression which, after a few minutes, began to irritate the taller of the two.

"'S matter?" he asked bellicosely. "Something wrong?"

"No," Dale said smiling. He decided at Algernon's tone, to proceed with caution. Their bonds of friendship were not cemented too strongly. "I was just wondering about that job."

Comprehension dawned in the eyes of Allergic Algernon. Dale wasn't being smart. The perfessor had him worried. No wonder. It had taken him ten years to get used to the guy.

"Ya mean the perfessor?" he asked.

Dale nodded. "Yeah. Tell me about him, will you? He's an interesting character."

"And how! Used to live at the Mansion, he did. Ten years ago. Then he got hold of some dough and rented this place he's in now. That's where I met Mooley, at the perfessor's."

Dale didn't know why he was interested in that fact, but he was.

"Yep," Algernon went on. "Couple of years back, that was. Went up there for something, money, I guess. And there was Mooley sittin' on a crate, lookin' much the same as he does now. Fact, the only difference is that he had less clothes on . . ."

"Less clothes on! What do you mean, he was naked?" Dale asked in surprise.

"Say!" Algernon acted as though he had been told something. "Come to think of it, he was damned near naked. Just a strip of cloth around his middle. Funny, I never wondered where his clothes were. But Pokestitch passed him off so fast, it never made me curious. Said he stopped in and, ah!"

"Go on!" Dale demanded. "And what?"

"That's why I never wondered about his clothes. The perfessor said he'd taken them away; they were too dirty or something. Knew there was an explanation."

DALE digested the information in silence while Algernon and Mooley drank their beer. Dale noticed an odd thing about their drinking. The shorter man didn't lift his stein until Algernon did. In fact he did nothing until the other did it first. Dale placed that fact in the back of his mind. It was just another of the things he had to ask about. But back to Pokestitch.

"You started to tell me about the professor," he probed.

"Oh yeah. He's a funny egg, all right. Don't know the time of day. Don't know the day, f'r that matter. Never thinks about money. Lets it lay around like you saw. Lives upstairs of the garage. All he thinks about is them big tubes and stuff. Boy, oh boy. I'll never forget the time Mooley got to foolin' with one of them tubes. The perfessor threw a hemorrhage. Damn near killed Mooley. Swearin' like a first sergeant, he was. Made me laugh, he did. Said Mooley'd better stay away from there. That just because . . ."

The strangest look came to life in Algernon's eyes. He had stopped in the midst of his tale and turned his glance away from Dale. He looked off in the distance with a vacant expression in his eyes. Then, in a low voice, he said:

". . . Mooley helped him . . . That he'd send him back if he ever caught him foolin' around again. Back to where, Harris?"

Dale shrugged his shoulders. He had no answer to that question.

Algernon became angry for some reason when he saw Dale's shrug.

"Say!" he demanded truculently. "What's the idea of all the questions?

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You a flattie or somethin'?"

Dale countered with, "Do I look like one?"

Suddenly Algernon grinned. Turning to his companion, he asked:

"Think he's okay, Mooley?"

Dale would have sworn it was laughter he saw in Mooley's eyes. Then they resumed their blank stare, and the man said:

"Okay."

"Well, that settles it. Mooley says you're all right. So it's okay by me. Hey! What time you supposed to be back, if you're supposed to be back?"

Dale looked at his wrist watch. He had half an hour. Time had slipped by unnoticed.

"I'm supposed to," Dale said. "Here," he threw a ten dollar bill on the table. "That's for some beer. And by the way, I'm living with Pokestitch now. So I'll see you up there from now on."

THERE was a light on in the garage. He saw it as he was walking up the companionway. And the door was off the latch. He had forgotten to ask for a key. He breathed a sigh of relief. Pokestitch was so absent-minded he had probably forgotten about him, Dale thought.

But the professor hadn't forgotten.

He was sitting at the desk. Another man sat on a crate drawn up so that it stood alongside the desk. The two were in a low-voiced conversation. Dale hadn't consciously entered with any show of silence. It was just that the door opened noiselessly. And his shoes had made no sound on the concrete floor. Or perhaps the two men were so interested in their talk, they didn't notice him. But he came in some of the talk.

". . . will make us control the world. And we'll take care of you, my friend."

Pokestitch looked up just then, saw Dale, and smiled a welcome. The other, seeing the smile and that Pokestitch was looking beyond him, glanced over his shoulder. A frown of displeasure thinned his lips and narrowed his eyes.

Pokestitch hastened to explain:

"The man I was telling you about. My new assistant. This is Mister . . ."

"Glad to know you," the stranger said hastily, cutting in on the introduction. "Well, must be getting along. Don't forget, Pokestitch. When it's complete, let me know."

He didn't offer to shake hands but simply arose, and walked quickly to the door. Dale got a fast impression of smooth face, immaculate dress, middle height, and an overall air of sureness. Especially in the face. No highlights of cheekbone's anging, or sunken eyes. The man's whole demeanor was smooth. Too smooth.

Pokestitch walked the other to the door, where they talked in low tones for a few minutes. Then the scientist returned.

"Tired?" he asked, sending a keen glance at Dale.

"Why?"

"I'd like to complete a phase tonight. Of course if you're too tired we can let it go until the morning."

"Might as well do it tonight," Dale said, knowing it would please the man. Besides, Dale was more than a little interested in what was to be done.

Pokestitch led Dale to a panel on the wall. A series of switches, knobs and buttons made a metallic display on the dark board. There were numbers or letters over each projection. Pokestitch explained what he wanted done.

"For now," he began, "the A and B coil is to be used. When I signal, throw the *A* and *B* switch as I call them. Understand?"

He didn't wait for a reply, but walked

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to a complicated affair of coils and wires. It glowed with a pale green light. Beyond it some ten feet, was a screen much like a projection screen used in home movies. A funnel came out from the wired apparatus, and pointed its open mouth toward the screen.

Dale stationed himself at the panel.

Pokestitch fiddled with something which Dale could not see.

"*A* switch," the command came.

Dale threw it. The pale green light deepened, turned almost blue.

"Now the *B*."

SUDDENLY the blueness faded. Not gradually, but of a sudden. A deep amber light paled into gold untinged by bronze. And a phantom shape was thrown on the screen. It grew form, became more distinct, took shape, definite, human. Dale's eyes widened, grew round in unbelief. He felt a vast sense of unreality. Yet he was certain that the explanation for the image was simple. A sort of movie projection. If it weren't so clear. And he couldn't see the inner structure of it. He could see all, liver, lungs, vertebrae, everything. Everything but a . . . heart!

"Come here, Harris," Pokestitch commanded.

Dale left the panel and hastened to the other's side.

"Step up close to the screen and tell me, is that a completely human form on it?"

But Dale's young and keen eyes had not misled him. They verified what they had seen from a distance. The shape on the screen had no heart.

Pokestitch sighed heavily, wearily, and said:

"Pull the switches, Harris."

Dale followed the scientist back to the desk where Pokestitch seated himself as though he was terribly tired.

"I just wanted you to verify what I have always found," he said. "I could have easily pulled the switches without aid. Queer. But I was never afraid before. Now I am. Those damned creatures. They have all else. But heart, no."

Dale came right to the point:

"This energy you spoke of this afternoon, this has to do with it?"

"Everything. I can control it, yet it seems to come from somewhere or something which has a will, a life of its own. So that sometimes I think I am only a slave, a something which this, *thing*, for want of a better term, is using."

"And what has Dox to do with this?" Dale asked.

Pokestitch looked away from the top of the desk at which he had been staring with an all-observing attention.

"Dox?" he asked wonderingly. "What do you know of Dox?"

"I happened to see a letter on the desk when I cleaned it this afternoon, and I read it. My name is not Harris. My name is Herrick. Dale Herrick, owner of Herrick Enterprises."

The name hadn't registered. Either Pokestitch knew nothing of Herrick Enterprises, or he was a fine actor. Dale gave him the benefit of the doubt.

"Dox are our largest competitors," Dale went on. "I suppose it isn't any of my business, but they are well-known for their underhand work. And they vowed long ago, to send us to the wall. I'm sure that what you are doing has an important . . ."

"It has," Pokestitch broke in. "They have subsidized me. Because of what you've seen. Do you know what that is?"

Dale shook his head.

"That is a mutation, a manufactured human," Pokestitch said softly.

Dale whistled sharply. The implication of Pokestitch's words took him

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with stunning force. A mutation. But how? From what?

"The Dox people want me to manufacture them, by the thousands. They'd be robots, better even, and the cost is negligible, far less than the least intricate of metal men. Only . . . I—I'm afraid." He shuddered and buried his head in his hands.

DALE shoved his hands deep in his pockets. It was a habit of long years standing. His fingers felt something. The string. He pulled it out. There was a knot half-way up its length. Half-way up! What was the meaning of that? Was it symbolic of something? Of life, perhaps? Or only of the problems he had to face? He shoved the string back. He was faced with the real here, not the imaginary.

Suddenly, something Algernon had said returned to him.

"Mooley. He was one of them, wasn't he?" he asked.

"Yes. The first. It's because of him that I'm afraid. I can make the rest come to life, although Dixon, the man you saw tonight, doesn't know that. I think there is a contract, though in my absent-mindedness perhaps I didn't sign it. But he says there is. And he is pressing me. There is something he has over me. I can't, Herrick. I can't!"

The laughter in Mooley's eyes. Dale felt sure, now, that he had seen it. What did it mean? Pokestitch knew.

"Tell me about these mutations," Dale said. "Who and what are they?"

"Beings from another world. They are as we, only without a heart. And I think without a soul. Mooley never gave any signs of having one.

"I'll tell you what happened that first time he came. The screen gave him life, and the elixir breathed movement into him. He stepped down from the screen, a two-dimensional being who became three-dimensional. He was naked. Herrick, believe me, when I saw you this afternoon, it was as if someone had said this man will help you. That's why I'm telling you all this. I know it sounds like a pipe dream, the imaginative creations of a madman. But I'm sane. Believe me."

"I believe you," Dale said.

"Thanks. Thanks. Now I can go on, and perhaps you can tell me what to do. Mooley told me that I had created him out of the emptiness of space, out of the infinite structure of the universe which is beyond human vision. That there are an infinity of uncreated humans waiting to be brought to life. But I am not a God. I'm a scientist, a man who had an idea he could utilize something he thought held a reality and physical concreteness."

Dale interrupted the other. There were several things he wanted cleared up.

"How did you get connected with Dixon?" he asked. "Why is he so hot on it?"

"I told you," Pokestitch said wearily. "He says that he can use them in his business."

Why he asked the next question, Dale had no idea. It came to his lips and he let it pass.

"Did Mooley have anything to do with Dixon's coming to you?"

The terror in Pokestitch's face was answer enough.

"What have they on you?" Dale asked. He no longer was the youth who only that afternoon had come to this garage. A something inexorable, ageless as life, had entered into his soul. He knew this was a problem which concerned all humanity, not just the Herrick Industries. Well, he had always wanted to play his part in the

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affairs of the world. He was in it up to the hilt now.

Pokestitch's voice held a sing-song quality:

"I told you I am an abstract scientist, despite my dealings with the physical. My whole world, my whole life is bound up in science. It is the very breath of existence to me. Dixon threatens to expose me, have me committed to an institution, if I don't do as he commands. It would be worse than death. And I do not have the courage to resist. Yet I fear the evil which I *know* lies in these creatures I can bring to life."

DALE took several turns about the room. His brain was on fire. Every fire in him raged at the thought of his helplessness. For he realized that he *was* helpless. What was there for him to do? How could he stop Dixon. Pokestitch had just placed himself in Dale's hands. He felt sure that Dixon had a means of committing the scientist. And since he had the means, Dale could find them also. There was a key, a clue to this, though, that Dale wanted to run down. He felt sure that the key could unlock a door from behind which . . . From behind which, was what?

Mooley! He was the key. Dale snapped his fingers in excitement. Hurriedly, he threw over his shoulder a "See you later. Don't worry," as he ran from the room.

He whistled a cab to the curb. He was in front of the tavern in ten minutes. Just in time to see Allergic Algernon, assisted by Mooley, stagger from the doors. Dale waited until they had passed the cab before he paid the driver.

He hugged the dark shadows of buildings as he followed the two to the door of the Mansion.. To his surprise, Mooley shoved the tall man inside. Mooley waited for a second or two, then pivoted on his heel and came back toward Dale. It was lucky for Dale that the building's archway he was hidden in was deep and dark. Mooley swung by, eyes set straight ahead.

Dale let him get far enough ahead so that he could not hear him, or if he should turn, Dale could manage to find shelter somewhere.

Mooley led Dale down Van Buren street to Clark. He crossed Clark, and walked south down the west side of the street, past redolent chop suey places, taverns, and Chinese groceries, shuttered and mysterious-looking. Suddenly, in the middle of the block, Mooley disappeared.

Dale forgot discretion in his excitement. Forsaking the doorways, he plunged headlong after the other, and came to a halt about where he had last seen Mooley.

A wholesale meat market stood cheek by jowl with a hand laundry. Both stores were dark, and steel shutters guarded their entrances. But adjoining the hand laundry was a tavern whose double windows and door had Venetian blinds shutting out any vision of the interior. Dale looked at the blinds, nonplussed. There was a beer sign, neon-lighted, hanging above the entrance. It illuminated the small lobby. Yet Dale was prepared to swear that Mooley hadn't entered this place.

On an impulse, Dale stepped to the door and twisted the knob. It opened readily. He stepped inside, lowering his head a trifle, so that it would be hard to distinguish his features. The place was so dark there was no necessity for his precaution.

There were several dozen people drinking at the bar and booths. He quickly made for the bar and stationed

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himself in the darkest corner. And while he ordered beer, he looked furtively about. His eyes gleamed brighter, when he saw Mooley at the far end of the bar, in close conversation with two men.

Dale kept his head down and peered from under the brim of his hat. The bartender served Mooley and his friends several drinks. From their appearance Dale figured they were going to make a night of it. But he was mistaken. After the third round, Mooley said something to which they both grinned, turned and walked toward the front door. He passed Dale without a second glance.

Dale was grinning to himself, as he dropped a coin to the bar and walked out after Mooley. The short man was walking south, slowly and unconcernedly Dale followed at a leisurely pace. Almost at the middle of the block, Mooley suddenly paused under a street standard. Just ahead of Dale a dark areaway loomed. He stepped within, and peeked out from the brick of the wall.

HE DIDN'T hear anything. Perhaps it was a sixth sense. Whatever it was made him turn his head. He did it in time to receive a smashing blow at the back of his skull. Darkness made a pool for his plunge into unconsciousness.

Something was choking him, Dale felt. He became aware of other things also. His hands, his legs were bound. But something was choking him. He opened pain-wracked eyes. Darkness. He became aware of light. It seeped past the shutters of his slitted eyes. Then he noticed the rocking motion. Was he on a boat? He felt a jouncing movement; his head struck sickeningly against a hard something, and he felt his stomach heave in protest. He choked back the sickening feeling. Slowly, painfully, consciousness returned. He grinned bitterly to himself in the darkness. He had been spotted the instant he had stepped into the tavern. Mooley had walked ahead, certainly. But he had told his two henchmen to follow Dale. It was that simple.

He became aware of voices, the rough, heavy voices, so similar in expression that there was no mistaking the fact that they came from similar persons.

One said, "Why don't we just dump this guy out and back the car over him? I don't like the idea of maybe a squad car pulling us to the curb."

"Yeah," said the other voice. "Twitchie's right. Why ask for trouble?"

"Really, gentlemen," another voice said, this one low-pitched, casual in tone, and of cultured quality. "There's no need to worry. We're bound on legitimate business. Perhaps it is late but we're coming home." A laugh followed the words.

There was nothing of humor in that laugh.

"Yeah. An' I hope the cops go for the story," one of the heavy voices said.

Dale came to the conclusion that the cultured voice belonged to Mooley. That one spoke then:

"Perhaps if there was less of talk, there would be less of speculation. Suppose we hold silence until the end of the ride?"

THE now-familiar garage loomed large and somehow terrifying in the darkness. The chink of light was still to be seen, stealing from behind a curtained window. Not a sound, neither of insect or human was to be heard. Even the street, usually noisy with the voices of drunks or late-staying children, was silent.

The two characters with Mooley

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carried Dale to the door. Mooley placed his hand against the wood and shoved. Dale gagged on the dirty piece of cloth in his mouth. He had tried to call a warning to Pokestitch. Mooley had thought of everything.

"You can untie his bonds," Mooley said when they placed him on the floor.

Pokestitch, looking like he hadn't budged from the desk since Dale had left, was riveted in the chair, his face usually pale, livid now in fear. Dixon sat, his head half-turned toward them, his eyes wide in wonder at the unexpected arrival.

"Good evening, gentlemen," Mooley said. "I have brought you a gift. The young man you hired this afternoon. I caught him spying on me tonight, although he thought he was being clever. Your work, Pokestitch?"

Pokestitch was too frightened to answer. It was Dixon who answered.

"Damn it! I thought it was strange that he suddenly hired a man. Never needed one before."

Dale had been working his mouth to get the stiffness from the muscles. His arms and legs felt numb. But he knew it was a temporary feeling. In a little while circulation would return and he'd be able to move them. Until then, however, he could only stall for time.

"Leave him alone," Dale spoke up. "He never saw me before this afternoon, when you and the tall guy brought me here. But I saw a letter on his desk when I was cleaning it. That made me wonder about him. And when Algernon told me about you this afternoon, I felt I had to get to the bottom of this."

"Curiosity, eh?" Dixon grunted. "You and that famous cat. We'll have to carry the similarity out to the end."

But it was Mooley who wanted to know why Dale had become so curious:

"Just where do you come in on this?"

"My name is Herrick," Dale said. "It won't mean anything to you, Mooley. But it does to Dixon."

The smirk left Dixon's lips. A pensive look came into the grey eyes, and his lips tightened. Dale could almost see the brain working, behind the smooth mask of forehead.

"He's the heir to the Herrick fortune," Dixon explained. "And that letter he's talking about is the one where I told Pokestitch what I wanted of him. The one dealing with the plastic angle. This punk nosed around for some reason, and got himself all excited about it. The only thing is we've got to work fast now. They'll have more bloodhounds on his trail than there is blood."

"I don't think so," Mooley said. "I have a feeling that no one knows about his being here. Outside of my tall friend. Which brings to mind a problem, the solution of which will cause me a little anxiety. The one called Allergic Algernon, must also be gotten rid of."

"You mean that tall guy?" Dixon asked.

"Yes. He knows of my connection with Pokestitch. He is also aware of this one's identity, I think. When Herrick left the Mansion, or rather when we came back to it, he let himself into Herrick's room and rummaged through the bag Herrick brought with him. There was a peculiar gleam in Algernon's eyes when he returned. I'm sure he knows."

HOPE rose in Dale's breast. Algernon knew. Then the memory of the man's condition returned to him and hope sank. Algernon would probably sleep till morning. By that time, Dale would be a corpse lying out among some high weeds, someplace.

Dixon nodded in satisfaction. This

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strange being was not the superman he let himself out to be. He could make mistakes. Satisfaction changed to horror. But Mooley beat him to the punch.

"We'll take care of the tall one later. First, I have a truck parked in the alley. There is certain apparatus we are going to need. I have enough knowledge of it to operate it. Pokestitch will come along, of course, and do the necessary adjustments."

Suddenly Dale began to laugh. They turned wondering looks to him as if they thought he had gone crazy.

"You fools," Dale taunted. "Thought of everything, haven't you? Everything but the little human element. Pokestitch. I don't think he'll work with you, no matter what your threats. How do you like that?"

Mooley smiled derisively.

"I see he has been telling you his troubles," he said. "But we won't need him too much. I think I can handle it. I've not wasted my time coming here with Algernon."

Dale had only been stalling for time. The numbness had left his arms and legs. And while he spouted words at them, he had been covertly watching the two hoodlums. They were leaning against a large crate, expressions of boredom on their faces.

Dale flexed his legs under him. He had to keep the two, Dixon and Mooley, talking. Just a few more seconds. Even as Dale calculated when the second would come, Dixon turned to Mooley and said:

"Are you sure you can? After all, my people aren't going to spend . . ."

"Your people? Don't be a fool, Dixon," Mooley said vehemently. "You've served your purpose. You've provided the money for the experiment. That's all I wanted of you. Now it is complete. I don't need you either."

Panic shone bright and frightening in Dixon's eyes. He had never thought it would come to this.

"But, but," he stammered. "I, I thought that we'd work together. That . . ."

It was then Dale went into action. He was certain that the two hoodlums had guns. And that they would use them. But nothing mattered except the need for destroying the machinery.

He came to his feet, shouting to Pokestitch:

"Come on, man! Do something!"

Mooley turned a blank look in his direction. Then the charging body plunged headlong into him. Dixon seemed rooted to the crate. But not for long. He started for the two and felt strong hands grab his throat from behind. Pokestitch had lost the lethargy which had him in its grip. At the same time the two hoodlums went into action.

Dale's flying leap had taken Mooley by surprise. Before the man from another world could do more than throw his arms up in sheer reflex, Dale had thrown two of his Sunday punches. They landed high on Mooley's jawbone, jarring the synthetic man, and sending him back from the shock. Oddly, there was no mark where the blows landed. Mooley made no effort to defend himself. Not even when Dale hit him twice more.

DALE had the horrible feeling he was striking a lump of clay. And remembered what Algernon had said about Mooley. That he felt no pain. He heard the pounding feet of the hoodlums coming to Mooley's rescue. Before they reached them, Dale managed to get his fingers around Mooley's throat. The other didn't resist. Dale saw the odd look of amusement in Mooley's eyes, as he squeezed with all the power in his young muscles. Just a few seconds were all he needed. But

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it was not to be. Something struck his head. He staggered away from Mooley, blindness making a shade for his eyes. There was a confusion of sounds, shouts, screams.

He staggered back shaking his head. Another blow, this one deflected by his arm. He willed himself to turn and give fight. But they were no longer interested in Dale. It was Pokestitch who held the center of the stage. Dale saw the whole thing through pain-blurred eyes.

Dixon, his face a purple mask, lay on the floor beside the desk. Pokestitch, a heavy piece of pipe in his arm, stood by the screen. He was facing the strange green-glowing grid. His mouth was open and he was shouting:

"Never! Never, I say! I'll destroy it first!"

The two hoodlums and Mooley were facing Pokestitch a few feet in front of him. Their backs were to Dale. He had been forgotten in the greater urgency. As Dale's head cleared, he heard Mooley say in a low voice:

"Shoot the idiot. Before he wrecks the machine."

Dale saw one of the hoodlums reach into his pocket, saw the unmistakable bulge of a gun, and left his feet in a flying tackle. He struck the hoodlum at the knees sending the man sprawling forward into Pokestitch. The scientist teetered for a second, then fell forward throwing the length of pipe from him. It landed into the complication of glowing wires. There was a vivid flash, bright as lightning. Dale had the impression that the screen had glowed bright with the figure of a naked human on it. Then, from the door there came voices, men in blue and after, the tall figure of Algernon.

Dale picked himself up with the help of a policeman. Each of the hoodlums was being helped to their feet also, but not as gently as was Dale. Another was bent over Dixon, and Dale saw that Dixon was not dead. He felt glad of it. Dixon had only been a tool of Mooley's. The thought of Mooley made Dale look to where he'd seen him last. He was gone.

But on the floor, where he had been standing, was a cardboard figure, the exact shape of a man. It was naked. But there was no mistaking it. It was Mooley!

Later, when all but the lieutenant of police and a sergeant had left, Pokestitch explained.

"The grid was wrecked. And whatever the catalyst that formed Mooley, it too was wrecked. Perhaps he could only exist while it existed? Yes, that must be the answer."

"Lucky for us Algernon came with his reinforcements," Dale said. "How come?"

"Heck. I wasn't as drunk as Mooley thought. And he said something to himself about taking over the perfessor's garage. So I played possum till he left. Then I got the cops," Algernon explained proudly.

Dale reached for his pack of cigarettes. But this hand came up with the length of string. There was a knot at the middle and one on each end. And even as he looked at them they disappeared.

Dale thought he knew the answer. That the gods only help those who show a willingness to aid in the process.

COMING NEXT MONTH . . .
"THE LAMP OF VENGEANCE"
By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON
A DRAMATIC, ACTION-PACKED NOVEL, BY A GREAT WRITER

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Mr. BELLER and the WINGED HORSE

by Geoff St. Reynard

Mr. Beller was certain of only two things: the horse was able to fly—and he was going to ride it.

SUNSET; scarlet, gold, and pure eye-aching blue, sky and sea dissolving into each other to make an infinite splash of wonderful colour that spread itself over all the world, as though some titan artist had flicked his brushes to clean them and accidentally splattered the sky.

Sunset; and like the joyous uproar that heralds a really good dog-fight a mile away, the pandemonium of Mr. Beller's daily skirmish with his creditors echoed up and down the entire length of Tinga-Tinga Island.

From the fronds of a giant purau on the southeastern side of the island two noddy terns stared with black unwinking eyes toward the village road, into the drowning sun. There was something moving on the road, something hurtling toward them—the tiny figure of a man, a short roly-poly little man in grubby dungarees who was pelting along so rapidly that his legs were scarcely visible. With his right hand he clutched to his head an ancient sun helmet, with his left he held a small brown suspicious-looking bottle with a perfectly filthy cork in its mouth. Behind this little man came twelve or thirteen bronzed and husky Polynesians, racing after him like so many magnificent gods come to life from some heathen pantheon. This was a ritual, this pursuit, that came as regularly as sunset.

The pair of noddy terns exploded out of the tree and flapped away with long-drawn, indignant croakings.

A little later the undergrowth on the edge of the white beach was parted cautiously and out crept Mr. Beller, the little fat man in dungarees, after scanning the terrain with care. He strolled a little distance toward the water and sat down on the scorching coral sand, patting vigorously at his filthy face with a much filthier relic of a handkerchief.

"Silly, avaricious, greedy blokes!" he muttered. "Get their blooming money when the boat comes in."

He could not have been called one of Tinga-Tinga's natural attractions . . . Nothing more precisely like the stereotyped beachcomber of fiction could have been imagined: he was of a reddish complexion, with a quite scarlet button nose; under this button was a four days' growth of beard, like so many sharp wee pins pricking out through his jowls; and to polish off this beachcomber appearance (which one would almost have said was a dis-

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Air whistled past him as he fell, and then a silvery body shot swiftly beneath him . . .

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guise, it was so very good) he was completely surrounded by a powerful alcoholic aura, an almost visual haze, eighty-six proof. He looked like a miniature Falstaff, somewhat degenerated, and in mufti.

He was a beachcomber of family tradition, too, for his father had been a fat little man in grubby dungarees before him. Even the eighty-six proof haze was hereditary.

Now he tips the small brown bottle up, the apple of his throat bouncing in gleeful anticipation, and now he tosses the bottle from him petulantly.

"Empty! Blast it, anyway!"

Turning to stare morosely out to sea, he stiffens and rubs his pouched, reddened eyes; he looks again. He leaps to his feet. He is agog with tremendous excitement. Does he see old Neptune rising from the waves, or perhaps a floating bottle full of fine whiskey? His expression says it cannot be less.

"Te pahi!" he bawls hoarsely. *"Te pahi!* The boat! The ship!"

MY dear Lucille,

I very nearly wrote "Babe" just then! It's difficult to grow used to the idea that little sister is a young woman now, and must not be addressed by undignified nicknames, such as were used last year. So then—my dear Lucille:

You owe us both that exquisite dinner, I'm happy to say, though I'm afraid we won't be around to collect it for some time. We've won the bet, and more, much more—shall I order lobster thermidore, with lovely fattening potatoes O'Brien, and all the trimmings; with chocolate eclairs and a quart of ice cream apiece to finish up with? The thought makes me want to shriek with delight. But I want to get into our story at once, so shall we begin at the beginning?

There were some things, of course, I didn't know about until the whole affair was over and done with, but Mr. Beller and Kitty have supplied those in garrulous detail. Mr. Beller? He is sitting beside me, here on the gritty warm coral sand of Tinga-Tinga, and you shall be introduced to him when we plunge into the tale. I know his suggestions as I write it will be very valuable and very, very Cockney.

You know, to begin with, then, that my golden-haired Kitty went to bed with acute lobar pneumonia in December; and you recall that I handed over my practice to brother Rollin lock, stock, and hypodermic needle, while I first pulled my wife through the dreadful siege and afterwards took her on a greatly needed vacation. You know how she knocks herself out over my work—she was run very ragged.

Remember the evening we kissed you good-bye on the front porch? And the bet we made:

"You won't find out a thing," you said confidently. "How can you expect to play sleuth on a legend that's a million years old and find out anything new, when you're only a pill-peddler? A dinner to a breakfast you don't do it!"

"Done!" said I. We shook hands solemnly. You've lost. But let's not anticipate, shall we?

We planned to travel through all the warm countries of the world, for Kitty of course couldn't risk the chill breezes that might bring on a second illness. Things have always come to her in pairs: attacks of measles, suitors, duplicate Christmas presents, and so on, and I wasn't going to take a chance on a second attack of pneumonia that would probably injure her heart.

When at last the Statue of Liberty gave us a farewell we settled down in our cabin and did nothing but babble

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about Pegasus. What, where, who, why . . .? all the way across. We globe-trotted a goodish bit, doing the regular tourist gaping act (Gee, look at all the tall buildings!), and then we went to Corinth. We saw the Fountain of Pirene there—it was exactly like the description in the guide-book, wonder of wonders—and we talked to archaeologists and palaeontologists and all such manner of bespectacled little men, and when we were done we were more determined than ever to track down the original legend of the winged horse. By this time our once-pet-hobby had become a mania with my wife and me, and we were hot for results.

A couple of years ago Kitty's mother and dad told us they'd heard some hint or other concerning a winged animal when they were vacationing in Tahiti; well, one day Kitty sneezed, so we packed up our socks and headed for the South Seas.

Romance, beauty, noble savages, enchanted paradise . . . it sounded wonderful. So with Pegasus and Kitty's sneeze for our excuses, and your derision of our notion that Pegasus wasn't a Greek for a spur to drive us on, to Tahiti we went.

Nothing.

Not so much as a breath about old Pegasus.

It was very disheartening.

WE HAD almost given up when one day I met the half-caste owner of a trading schooner—there's a slice of real romance for you, little sister!—in a hotel near the isthmus of Taravao. He'd heard, or thought he'd heard, or thought perhaps he knew someone who had a friend who'd heard of a flying cow legend in the Fenua Motu. So, naturally. . . .

Behold us, then, in a small distinguished cluster of two, at the rail of a hundred-ton schooner (broad in the beam and squeaky as to the rigging), my long frame draped expectantly over the rail, Kitty's golden mop beside me, as our captain threaded his way skillfully through the shoals toward the dock of more-or-less exotic Tinga-Tinga Island.

The boat wasn't due for a week yet; a pleasant surprise it must have been for the islanders, though, for once every six months is seldom enough to get news from the outside world. This little far-flung group of motu (I believe that translates as islands, or perhaps it means the coral atolls that surround them also, I'm not sure yet), of which Tinga-Tinga is the largest, have sprawled themselves all over the sun-soaked sea some five hundred miles northeast of Tahiti, almost-mythical little splotches of green in the azure ocean, owned by no one but the natives. Twice a year the schooner comes plunging through the shoals bringing tools, clothing, civilized food and civilized luxuries, and best of all bringing news, to the natives.

Perhaps I'm looking at it from my own viewpoint, however. I'm not at all sure that these natives are so absorbed in news of the outer world as I would be if I lived here. Maybe they're contented with their own tiny fragments of news. Mama Oha had a baby . . . Old Krakau stubbed his toe . . . Quite like a little Pennsylvania town.

A positive swarm of light-brown islanders were laughing and shoving each other around on the dock, and right in the middle of them my binoculars picked out a fat little red-faced chap with a kind of genial dirtiness I could almost smell. He seemed to be the only white man waiting for us. I swung my glasses along the beach and then back to the dock and over to a great pile of sacks full of copra, and there

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was another white man. He was sitting on top of the copra sacks smoking a short black pipe, and although the fat little man's dirt was friendly and welcoming, this fellow's cleanliness was a tainted, unnatural thing. You may think that's an odd thing to say about a clean man, and especially when I was looking at him through a pair of binoculars. Well, possibly later acquaintance has done something to colour my impression, but I tell you I felt a queer cold shudder run over my spine as I looked at the second man. He was not even looking at the schooner, as any normal man would have done, but was engaged in cleaning his fingernails with a knife. He wore starched white ducks and a shining shirt, his hair gleamed like a beacon across the waters as the dying sun struck it with a lingering ray, and the black pipe was the only thing about him besides his sleek black hair that was not clean, shiny white. I kept the glasses glued on him as we approached, and he didn't improve with proximity. Once, just once, he glanced up, and I felt his pale eyes flicker over me like a snake's before he bent his head to his work again.

A snake—that's it. He has always reminded me of a snake. A snake is really one of the cleanest things in the world, you know, all dry and clean and rustling and deadly. There, I've given away the villain to you! It doesn't matter, you'd have found out soon.

As we neared the island the dirty little man waved his arm in a broad gesture as though he wanted to make us free of the place, and shouted across the rapidly lessening stretch of water, "Welcome to Tinga-Tinga!" I could have embraced him from sheer good humour. He promised to be priceless.

WE WALKED down the gangplank, pale golden girl and slim tanned white man among a crowd of friendly fellows who were coming home from Tahiti, and the tubby little man came up to us and afforded us a better look at him. He was the typical beachcomber we've often read about, red-faced and bearded (if you can title four days' worth of whiskers a beard) and dirty, and merry-looking.

"Hi!" sang Kitty.

"Evening, miss," he mumbled, twitching off his battered sola topi with a lightning movement. "Evening, sir." He sought rapidly for something to say, pushing his button nose up with a grimy forefinger.

"Err—ahh—welcome to Tinga-Tinga!"

His accent baffled me then, and does today. Whether he is a real Bow Bells Cockney who has associated at some time with gentlemen, or whether he is a kind of gentleman who has adopted a half-Cockney dialect as protective coloration, I never have guessed. One can't ask him, either, naturally. Perhaps one day he'll tell me.

Anyway, I stuck my hand out at him.

"Valentine-Gordon-call-me-Val," said I. "Kitty, my wife."

The blonde girl shook his pudgy hand in turn.

"Eustace R. Beller," said he, and thus we came to know our magnificent Mr. Beller.

"Say," said I, talking to him just as though he were an old and valued friend, for he makes you feel that way immediately, "who's the white man on the pile of sacks over there?"

He pursed his fat lips disdainfully. "'Im? 'E's Kane. That's all, just Kane. No first name to speak of, or maybe it's no lawst name to speak of. Kane." He meditated a moment and then spat in the ocean. "A bit of no good, distinct."

With that we picked up our bags

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again and started toward the village. Mr. Beller trotted behind us, rapidly scattering the green crisp contents of a letter to a crowd of laughing Polynesians who jostled him. He is evidently a remittance man.

"Four pounds to Tavi," he growled, his legs twinkling and his brow furrowed in agonizing thought. "Two-an'-six to Mako—'ere, 'ere, you, stop your shoving now—'oo *do* yer think yer pushing?—seven shillings to Fana. . . ."

He was interrupted with stark jolting drama, a wailing shriek that came from the shore. Kitty whirled, I dropped the bags and loped down the beach. Over a tiny bundle on the sand a slim brown young woman was bending. As Mr. Beller and I arrived, panting, she looked up.

"Arai?" said the fat Englishman questioningly.

She moaned something in a Polynesian tongue. "Cut on the coral," said Mr. Beller.

The child, perhaps three or four years old, lay motionless, a slight trickle of scarlet staining the sand beside it. I pushed Mr. Beller aside, bent quickly down beside the poor little thing and gently explored its wound. The cut was relatively slight, but the child couldn't lose much more blood without some danger.

"It's not too serious," I said, "if it's attended to now."

Mr. Beller grunted wordlessly.

"Get the baby up to the village," I went on.

Mr. Beller's ruddy face had assumed the expression of a sorrowful Buddha.

"No use," he said sadly. "There ain't a doctor in the islands. They'll have to tyke it to Tahiti . . . five 'undred beastly miles."

"Good heavens," whispered Kitty behind me.

"Never mind," said I with as much authority as I could muster, "I'm a doctor."

As they picked up the child and we all went up to the village, I saw the white man Kane standing a little distance off, just by the lapping water. He was staring at the sunset with a perfectly blank expression. He might have been all, all alone on the island. He didn't move or turn his head as I followed Mr. Beller and the natives, but only stood watching the murmuring, secret sea.

THE child of Arai had stopped its crying and slept; the enormous moon—and oh, how I wish you could see it, Lucille!—was silvering the coral sand, and the three small figures who sat by the canescent sea were silver, too. It was a silver night.

"The baby will live, no doubt of that," I said sleepily. "But it's a damned shame that there's no doctor on these islands."

"Ow, I was exaggeratin' a bit . . . There's native docs, o' course, but they're not much good, not for the big things, and because no blinking guvment owns these motu, no blawsted guvment sends us a doctor," answered the smallest and tubbiest of the three moon-silvered figures.

"Val," said my wife suddenly, "why don't you ask Mr. Beller about the legend now?"

"Say, that's right! He'd know if anyone would—Beller! Did you ever hear of the legend of Pegasus?"

"P e g a s u s?" The beachcomber scratched his head, pushed his nose toward his forehead with a dirty finger. He searched with audible grunts and groans the obscure recesses of a rum-bleared memory. "Pegasus. Peg— Ow, the flying 'orse?"

"That's right."

"There's a legend about 'im in these

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very islands," stated Mr. Beller proudly, as if he had just discovered it.

"By glory!" exclaimed Kitty, attempting a sitting somersault. "We did it!"

Well, darling, I leave it to you to imagine our feelings; you were hopelessly beaten out of that dinner, we had tracked Pegasus down, and we were overjoyed. My idea *had* sounded so crazy to everyone but Kitty—an old Greek legend originating somewhere in the South Seas—but here it was, just like her parents had said it was, and Polynesia is immeasurably more ancient than Greece, as I've always maintained in spite of your school books!

Well . . .

"We had a bet with my little sister back home," I explained to the amazed Mr. Beller. "She thought we were crazy. Everyone contends that the winged horse originated in Greece, where it was popularized; Kitty's folks came out here to the islands years ago on their honeymoon, and got wind of a story about a flying animal—perhaps a horse—the remotest, faintest, wispiest suggestion of the breath of a legend—and we got the slightly cockeyed notion that Pegasus was a Polynesian."

Kitty joined in.

"You see, the winged horse was supposed to live near the Fountain of Peirene, or Pirene, in Corinth. Why, that's nothing more than the old Greek system of receiving and distributing the city's water—"

Now we both spoke at once.

"And we said, gosh, no immortal horse is going to hang around a city's water supply—"

"And besides, a lot of the most beautiful legends came out of the South Seas—"

"Anyway, it was purely our own idea—"

"And we said, let's go to the South Seas during our vacation and track down old Pegasus—"

"And we talked to some archaeologists, and they said—"

" 'No one is sure of where any legend originated, and if they are, they're wrong'—"

"And now we've won!"

We sank back on the warm sand and laughed, completely out of breath, while Mr. Beller shook his round little head slowly.

"Eahahoia!" he muttered softly, giving the word (I learned afterwards) the inflection that means dismay and amazement. He gazed up at the moon and saw a long thread of curlews crossing its face . . . Had they been Pegasus himself, I think Mr. Beller would have shown no more surprise than a mouth-filling word like "Eahahoia!" It was truly a magical night.

WE ALL sat back and I guess we gawked at the sky like a lot of half-witted dopes, because there's something about a southern sky that takes you by the throat and shakes you if you're not talking or doing anything. We were silent for about five minutes, and Kitty and I concentrated on the moon, and it grew and grew until I might have reached for it, if a voice hadn't snapped our mood all at once.

The voice was quiet, sibilant, full of whispering consonants like water rushing over flat stones; it seemed to come from all about us, from the coral, the sky, the moon, the coconut palms and the pandanus trees and everywhere, and suddenly it felt as though we had dropped into a den of snakes, hissing and writhing and darting their evil tongues out at us. Although I'd never before heard his voice, I knew even before I whirled around that it would be the white man, Kane. It was.

He stood behind us, his starched

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ducks and shirt silver in the glittering moonlight, his short black pipe stuck into a corner of his mouth and cocked at a jaunty angle that in anyone else would have looked friendly, but that only added to his sinister appearance; I jumped when I saw him as if I'd sat on a bee.

"Sso you ssearch for the wonderful flying ssteed, do you?" He hissed the words through his teeth, and although he evidently meant to seem friendly he made the chills chase each other all over my hide. "I wondered when I ssaw you coming through the sshoals thiss evening, why does an obviously wealthy gentleman bring hiss wife to our lonely little island? Sso you are legend sseekerss . . ." His words trailed off into something so like a serpent's hissing that I involuntarily looked at the coral sand to see if something was wriggling toward us.

"Pegasuss," he went on, staring dreamily at the sea. "Yess . . . let me ssee. It was Bellerophon who ssucceeded in taming the creature, was it not?"

"Could be," I said churlishly.

"Yess . . . He made—no, he was given a magic bridle, and trapped the horsse as he dissported himself by the pool. He had to have him to battle the Chimaera, didn't he? That dreadful monster breathing brimstone and flames, with its three heads all roaring. A lovely tale. I think it wass Minerva who gave the bridle to him."

Without interrupting his hissing talk the white man struck a match on the bowl of his pipe and lit the dregs of the tobacco it contained.

"And now you ssearch for the original ssource of the legend, eh? Commendable. I wissh you good fortune."

He was gone.

"Whe-ew!" breathed our tubby beachcomber. "Glad 'e's gone. Cawn't stand him. Snyke!"

"He is a reptilian creature, Val," said Kitty. I was surprised, because it's a rare thing when she criticizes anyone.

"Well, he's an odd one, at any rate. What does he do here, Mr. Beller?"

The beachcomber spat. "Not a thing. Work, y'mean? Ha—no bloody fear. Wouldn't get 'is clothes dirty. 'E's a remittance man. If there's one thing I cawn't stand, it's a remittance man."

"Oh," I said.

LATER that night, when we had strolled back to the village and Mr. Beller was bidding us goodnight at our door, he leaned toward me confidently.

"Err—Doctor Gordon," he said, "I don't know just 'ow to put this, but would you—'ow would you consider the hidea of stayin' with us 'ere, for good, I mean? We need a real doc in the motu, need one bad. People always comin' dawn wif something, people gettin' theirselves bit with sharks, people slashin' theirselves on the ruddy coral . . . now 'ow would you—"

I grinned good-naturedly. Stay in these godforsaken islands with New York and my lucrative, if occasionally boring, practice waiting? "Not a chance."

The little beachcomber tumbled his words out over each other. "I know it ain't whatcher used to, but it don't cost much to live 'ere; we could pay you plenty to get along on an' put a little by, and the climate's healthy as Billy-be-blowed. . . . You took to the place tonight, you did, and the people's took to you first rate. You'd go like a blooming 'ouse on fire."

I sobered, for he was very much in earnest.

"Sorry, old man; I have lots of money—it isn't that. Back in America I'm what they call a society doctor. Oh, it's not the ideal job by a darn sight,

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telling fat matrons they've eaten too much chocolate candy, pampering rich old hag-ridden harridans—but on the other hand I'm not quite one of your romantic kind who can bury themselves in a 'South Sea paradise' all their lives, attending to shark bites and measles . . . I'm just not interested enough in these people! Sure, they're nice, but I like noise, movies, libraries, vanilla sodas and cold winter nights by a fire with my family and night clubs and—"

"Unreality!" hissed the little man. "That's wot yer civilization is—unreality! Look at me: born and brought up in the sound of Bow Bells, but would I stay there? No, I followed me father to the islands. There's reality in life here on the motu that you'll not find anywhere else."

"Not my sort of reality, I'm afraid," I said rather sharply. "Good-night, Mr. Beller."

"Good-night, Doctor," he groaned.

I'm sure that for hours afterward, when Kitty and I had fallen asleep on our tree-cotton mattresses, a fat little man in dirty dungarees sat soberly beneath the moon on a stretch of silver coral sand, a little man who meditated heavily, now and again shoving his button nose up in a characteristic gesture with a grimy forefinger. Sometimes, doubtless, he muttered something in a curious combination of English and Cockney and liquid Polynesian.

"'Ow to get him to stay 'ere . . . 'ow to do it . . . natives need 'im bad, they do. . . . *Atira!* Society doctor! Rats!"

And now and then he probably glanced toward the waning moon.

"Pegasus, 'e says. Blimey. Gorblimey! I wonder? I never really put me mind to thinking abawt—?"

FROM now on, Lucille dear, half of the tale is what I heard and saw and did, and half is what the others have told me about since it all finished up, and the third half is conjecture pure and simple.

Kitty had strolled down to the beach and was standing beside the tubby little beachcomber. He was tinkering with the sail of his broken-down cutter, a derelict like himself, which he called the Lady Jane (or, when he remembered to go heavy on his accent, the Lydie Jyne). He wore an oil-stained pareu over his dungarees, why the Lord knows. Certainly a little clean oil might have done them good.

"How about a sail today?" asked Kitty, smiling as he peered into the interior of his good ship. "Val's all upset—he keeps brooding over what might have happened to that child yesterday if he hadn't been here. You've actually got him on the run, Mr. Beller. He's wondering about things."

"And a good job too, if he wonders long enough to stay 'ere," said he vehemently. "'E's needed 'ere and he certainly ain't in Noo Yorkshire."

"New York," said the blonde girl automatically. "He thinks it might be good for me, too."

"You Mrs. Gordon?"

"Yes. I'm recuperating from pneumonia; the silly dear's afraid I'll get it again."

"Ow! Then this is the climate for you, orl right."

Kitty looked speculative.

"I wouldn't mind it so much myself, staying; it's a lovely fairy place. But Mr. Beller, how about a sail?"

The Englishman squinted at the sky. Its blue was shot with strange streaks of colour and there were odd lights in the north. He reflected at some length.

"Faarua," he said slowly. "Them lights there might mean a faarua, ma'am, and again they might not mean nothin' of the kind. Never saw lights

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quite like 'em before. Faaruas, they comes up with dark clouds. But I'd just as bleedin' soon not tyke chances with you two."

"Ridiculous," the golden girl chuckled. "We're not afraid. What's a faarua?"

"Nor'easter, ma'am. A big wind. I'm tapatai myself—that's what you might call 'blinking well not afeared of wind or as you might say water'." He blushed modestly.

"Then let's go," I broke in. I'd come down without the pair noticing me, and now I was struck favourably by the thought of a sail on this shining sea. I had on a pair of more-or-less clean ducks and a violent orange-and-blue sport shirt. "We're pretty much tapatai ourselves."

"Plee-ease, Mr. Beller," sang Kitty coaxingly.

"We-ell, naow," drawled the beachcomber reluctantly, though he was already won, "I shouldn't. . . ."

"Oh, good," said Kitty abruptly, and jumped into the little half-decked cutter. Seating herself with catlike daintiness on the deck, she gazed out toward the arc of the world. "That way," she commanded, pointing to the south.

Mr. Beller shrugged. He silently admitted defeat. Trotting up to his shack (a driftwood erection with a rusted corrugated iron roof), he vanished into its gloomy depths and emerged presently laden with a huge tin, waterproof, full of canned food, a sack of biscuits, matches, tobacco, a clasp knife, a small hatchet, and heaven knows how many other things, including a newly replenished small brown bottle.

"What on earth—going to play Robinson Crusoe, Beller?"

"No, *sir,* when Jane and me goes anywhere we carries provisions wif us! You never know, in the motu, you never know."

HE MOTIONED me into the old cutter, leaped in himself very agilely, and sat down at the tiller. A passing native hailed him anxiously as he pushed off. He answered in the dialect; the brown man shook his head, pointed to the north and spoke again, urgently. Mr. Beller made a wide gesture expressive of contempt for the elements and steered the boat away.

"Who was that?" asked my wife.

"Nui, the chief. *Noonoo ole!* He warned me about there bein' a faarua on its way. But I myself," said Mr. Beller confidently, as though he were the last word in oracles, "thinks as 'ow there'll be *no* faarua today."

"To the devil with the old faarua," said Kitty contemptuously, "we're all tapatai!"

Mr. Beller smiled genially and complimented her on the accuracy her quick tongue showed in handling the difficult Polynesian words. "You'd make a rare islander," quoth he.

"Maybe," said I dubiously.

Mr. Beller sat at the tiller and conned the tiny cutter out through the spray-screened reef. The boat, only sixteen feet long with a six-foot beam, was sensitive to the lightest puff of air, and fairly flew through the coral rocks toward the open sea. I noticed that the lights grew darker in the north, and crimson laced the cerulean sky.

It was not long after we had passed the reef that we heard a sharp hail from starboard. We all started up and looked wildly over the churning sea, but could discern nothing. A moment later the hail came again, and a white arm thrust up out of a tossing wave and beckoned us frantically. Mr. Beller headed his craft toward the man and shortly we were surprised and not so pleased to see that it was Kane. He swam with strong

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over-arm strokes to the side of the Jane and I gave him a hand. He clambered in and sat down on the edge of the half-deck and dripped and panted. He was dressed in white bathing trunks with a soaking silver-white sash wrapped around his waist. When he had gasped in a few breaths I queried him on his swim.

"Oh, I was sso foolish," he hissed wetly. "I often sswim beyond the reef, but today I ss-sshould have sseen the storm coming. No, I was meditating, I ssaw nothing until it was almost upon me."

We all spoke at once.

"Meditating! While you were swimming!" said Kitty.

"Storm! There ain't gonna be no storm today!" said Mr. Beller.

"You often swim beyond the reef! Impossible!" said I flatly.

"It iss nothing to sswim beyond that puny reef, nothing to disport myself in these seas; I can sswim for ten miles," he boasted. "And I often meditate out here all alone with the ssea and the ss-ssky. And to you, Beller, there will be such a sstorm in a very few minutes ass even you never ssaw. . . ."

Mr. Beller said nothing, but went to his waterproof tin box with a great air of mystery and took out a whacking big revolver, spun the chamber, and thrust it into his belt with grimly comical menace. He then returned to the tiller, snorted, "Storm, indeed!" and headed his boat into the teeth of the rising wind.

"We'd best be getting back now, I suppose," said Mr. Beller some five-and-thirty minutes later.

"*Kala!* This head wind is *some* strong!" exclaimed Mr. Beller five minutes after that; and he settled his venerable sun helmet a little more firmly about his ears, and saw that the revolver was safe and handy, and glanced at Kane, and put on a prodigious frown.

"'S'no method of manner of use heading into the beastly teeth of *that* gale," shouted Mr. Beller four minutes later, as he made a snatch and rescued his headgear from the rollicking wind just in time to prevent its drowning. "Maybe I was a bit wrong on that faarua business!" And Kane smiled reptilianly from where he lay stretched easily at full length on the deck.

"HANG on!" bawled Mr. Beller a minute afterward. "We're right in the middle of it. Hang blooming well *ON!*"

Hang on we did. Mr. Beller hung onto the tiller with all his not inconsiderable might; Kitty hung onto me; I hung onto the mast; and Kane plastered himself flat on the deck and seemed to cling to it with his ribs, like a snake, I thought, like a great white snake.

"Take down that bloody uncomplementary-worded sail!" howled the beachcomber. His words were pounced upon by the driving gale, shaken merrily, and thrown away.

Inexpert and green as I was, I tried to help him, and was promptly washed half-way overboard. Kitty screeched and hauled me back. We crouched under the half-deck, knowing we were of less than no use; the sail had gone by the board, a mass of tattered shreds. The mast splintered off with a sickening crunch and trailed wobbling in the roiling water for several minutes before it loosened altogether and floated away into the unknown. Mr. Beller and Kane fought the tiller together, throwing their combined weight at it and doing their best to avoid the greatest waves; they were both simply magnificent.

I won't try to describe half the sud-

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den rage of that storm. The merciless wind flung an endless procession of house-high whitecaps at us. The light soon grew so dim that we could see barely one wave-length away. Great malevolent floods of water assaulted the boat, and then in a little while—or a great while, I couldn't tell—the nor'-easter had passed us and gone sweeping on. Kitty peered out from beneath the deck. Mr. Beller looked at her with salt-burnt eyes and his stubby little face cracked in a smile of assurance, while he pried his pulpy sun helmet away from his globular skull.

"It's all over," he said.

"Whoo," sighed the golden girl. She crawled out and stood erect, attempting feebly to wring gallons of sea-water out of her dress. I followed and helped her. Worries concerning the sudden icy drenching crossed my mind, worries about Kitty and her rather frail constitution.

"How long d'you suppose that lasted?"

"Fifteen minutes, maybe twenty," answered the Englishman.

"See," said the girl, "I was closer than you, Val. I guessed four hours."

"Yeah," said I, "I made it six."

Mr. Beller chuckled and leaned against the tiller, but had sprung round again with a fearful oath before a second had passed.

"My pistol! It's gone! Where's my pistol, you, Kane, eh?"

"I haven't seen your ssilly weapon," hissed the streaming-wet snake man. "It must have washed overboard."

"Overboard, my left foot!" screamed the little man. "It was stuck in there tight. You sneaked it, you snyke!"

"I ssneaked nothing, Beller; where would I conceal a thing that enormous, anyway?"

"In that sash, that's where."

The silver-white s a s h certainly looked capable of hiding a pistol, or an elephant, or a whale, for that matter. It was yards long, wrapped around his waist until it stood out half a foot from his body. It was a curious affair to go swimming in, and might indeed have been the hiding place for Beller's weapon, but neither that tubby gentleman nor I felt up to searching Kane just then. Mr. Beller turned back to the tiller with a disapproving, disappointed, disgusted sniff full of righteous indignation.

THE cutter drifted sailless under a full moon. Drifted southward, for that way the currents ran, and that was all the power that we had.

Mr. Beller drowsed at the useless tiller. Suddenly he started, stared, rubbed his weary eyes. Ahead loomed a dark line of breakers.

"What is it?" I asked beside him.

"Not sure," the beachcomber replied. "I think it's the atoll of Nofea, an' if it is we're *for* it. There's no land in it—just the dyke of coral, 'round a salt-water pond. We'll likely smash up on the coral rocks."

Gradually we neared the reef. It was a terrifying sight, or would have been had we not seen the faarua first.

To the left appeared a narrow, a dreadfully narrow crooked passage. Mr. Beller attempted to steer toward it, but the tiller without a sail was practically useless. We four waited tensely. The booming of the breakers grew deafening, crashed out and died away and crashed again, was muted and then appalled us with its sudden roar.

We saw that we would probably make it, for we were in the main current that poured through the passage. The disabled cutter yawed abruptly, struck a coral projection and snapped it off, there was a grinding noise below us on the bilges and a little water seeped

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suddenly into the boat. The the reef was passed and the breaker's unceasing thunder lay behind us. I sat Kitty down on the comparatively dry deck.

"She was 'urt that time, poor old Jane was," asserted Mr. Beller. He was confirmed in his statement by the cutter, which now began to ship water alarmingly.

Mr. Beller meditated.

"We-ell," he grunted thoughtfully, "I *might* 'ave led a better life; but on the 'ole I'm not ashamed, and hit's as good a way as any."

Kitty giggled nervously. "I'm going looney," she said.

"What?" I asked sharply.

"I thought I saw a big Something fly across the moon just now—a thing that didn't look any more like a bird than—than Mr. Beller."

"Uh?" said Mr. Beller himself. He had been engrossed in his own dim thoughts.

"She's seeing Pegasus," I answered, my arm protectingly about my wife. I spoke lightly, but for a moment I was afraid for her. You know, pneumonia may start with mild insanity . . . and I'm a regular old woman!

Mr. Beller started up. The moon did not make as much light as it might have. He arose and, shading his eyes, gazed toward the sky.

We three were sitting on the deck and watching him. Kane had not spoken, or hissed, for so long that I think we had all forgotten him. Suddenly there was a swish like a great airplane, and something blotted out the moon for an instant as it swooped by just above us. In the moment before Mr. Beller was knocked sprawling into the bottom of the cutter, I got a glimpse of great silvery wings and long, white, powerful legs beating the air—four of them. Then it was gone, vanished into the sky.

"Whoosh! A pterodactyl!" I yelled; though I had seen what I had seen, I didn't believe it.

"A giant tern!" amended Kitty.

"A mirage," hissed Kane.

Mr. Beller picked himself up and wiped his ashen forehead with a grimy, shaking hand.

"My Gord," he muttered fervently. *"My Gord! Pegasus!"*

MORNING.

Mr. Beller ceased his bailing and glared accusingly at the horizon before him.

"Mirages," he said protestingly. "Storms, flying 'orses, and now mirages. Blime. What a time we're 'aving."

I lifted my aching body off the half-deck. Kitty still slept.

"What's that ahead?" Kane asked the little man. "An island, perhaps?"

"Blinkin' mirage, like you thought you sawr lawst night. There ain't no island in Nofea, only a great big lagoon and the ring of coral around it. What a jolly time we *are* 'aving."

"No land or not, that's certainly an island we're headed for now," said I.

Mr. Beller laid down his bailing utensil, the half of a coconut shell. He lifted the lid of the waterproof box and brought out the small brown bottle. Removing the cork with a forefinger and thumb, he drained a mighty draft. Then he carefully plugged it and put it away again. He looked once more toward the south. He blinked.

"Land . . . mouna . . . a mountain," he said incredulously.

"Cawn't be!" he remonstrated.

"But it is," he concluded.

"It's an impossible island, that's wot it is!" he cried out, and the blonde girl awoke and stretched.

"What's impossible?" she asked drowsily.

"The island we're about to land on," I grinned. She squealed in joy.

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The cutter drifted aimlessly, but the island grew distinctly larger as the hours passed. For one entire horrible hour we thought we were going to sail helplessly by it. But about mid-day the keel grated sharply on coral. Mr. Beller leaped weightily out and beached his boat; then we four stood silent and inspected our anchorage.

You can't possibly imagine it, Lucille. It was quiet, like a gigantic outdoor chapel, roofed with green purau, tou, and pukatea fronds, framed by the slick boles of the huge trees, carpeted with soft lush grass, splashed helter-skelter fashion with exotic wild scarlet flowers. It was good land, high and wooded, cool and virgin. We moved slowly inland.

"Gor!" exclaimed Mr. Beller, lapsing into strong Cockney tones. "Gor-*blimey,* what a place!"

We entered the forest, following a natural path that led up toward the center and highest point on the island. It was only a few minutes before I leaned over a smooth stretch of turf and burst out, "Look here!"

They crowded around me. The print of an enormous horse's hoof, unshod, lay on the ground. Even as we watched the grass began to spring upright into its ordinary position. We all gasped.

"A horse!" said Kitty.

"A horsse, in the Ssouth Sseass-ss!" Kane let out a long-drawn viper's hiss, and I felt the snake-cage close in again. "Ridiculouss!"

"Yes, a horse, and here not a minute ago," I said, with, I admit freely, a hasty and somewhat fearful glance about me.

"'Ark!"

Mr. Beller stood taut, rigid. Far off, coming nearer, we heard the crashing of small bushes and undergrowth. It neared, halted.

"Ko vai tera?" challenged the little beachcomber. "Nofea mai oe?"

Silence.

"Who goes there?" he shouted again. "Who the blinking blue blyzes are you, eh?"

Silence.

"Don't be ridiculous," admonished Kane once more. "It iss nothing."

Cautiously Mr. Beller parted the creepers skirting the path. Nothing.

By common unspoken consent we continued inland. We spoke little, and in soft voices.

IN A little while Mr. Beller began to puff with the exertion. He fanned himself with his old solar topi, while sweat trickled down his ruddy face.

The path slanted upward. Then in a little time, and with no warning at all, it stopped, and we broke through a screen of creepers before we could stop ourselves. A great spring poured from the rock before us.

It was utterly, magnificently beautiful, even after all the beauty we had seen in the island. Coming from a cleft in the hill, it ran whispering in a shadow-sprinkled tiny stream down to the green-fringed pool, a wide deep sapphire hole in the smooth turf. And all about it hinano and tiare blooms lay carelessly spread in confusion, and all about it, too, were the prints of a huge horse, unshod and as large by half again as the largest horse I had even seen.

"No horse, eh?" I remarked to Kane, who stared at the prints blankly.

"Now I remember this place," whispered Mr. Beller. "'Eard of it, and this spring, when I first come to the islands. Some said it was 'ere in the lagoon, some said other plyces. It's tabu, forbid, y'know. Called—lemme see, now, 's called Parena, or somfing of the sort.' Yes, Parena. No one's been 'ere, they say, no one at all for 'undreds of years."

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"Parena," said Kitty softly. "Pirene," she whispered to me. *"Pirene,* Val."

"It does give you the feeling that Pegasus might pop up suddenly, doesn't it?"

"Feeling? He might! Look at the prints."

"Darling," I protested, trying to make myself doubt my eyes; still worrying about her, "the winged horse is only a legend."

"Is 'e?" asked Mr. Beller, remembering certain things.

"Yes, he is. This is some mortal horse, you gaping idiots."

"Never 'eard of an 'orse in the South Seas," he said stubbornly.

"All legends are based on truth," said Kitty more softly yet.

"Um," said I uncomfortably.

LEAVING the tin box of food and the other things at the spring, we all set out to explore the island thoroughly. There was a cool freshness in the air that invigorated us and sapped the weariness from our bones. The noonday sun beamed generously down through the network of leaves above us, and even the pale white Kane viper grew almost friendly. We plunged downhill along an aisle of verdant green things, taking stock of coconut palms and other fruit and foods that would sustain us while we were cast away here; an hour and then two slipped by imperceptibly. It was like a picnic.

About four o'clock by the sun (my watch was ruined with the sea water) we came to the very tip of the island, the south-western tip which we had skirted several times in our explorations. Here it was that most of the taller trees grew, great giants of ancient vintage, forming a well-nigh impenetrable curtain across our path. Beyond them we could not see, but we were determined to inspect every foot of the island, so we delved about until Kitty or Mr. Beller, I forget which, discovered a narrow moss-grown trail leading through the enormous veil of shrubbery. We trooped along it until the big trees were left behind and we could see the spit of land that formed this end of our magic island.

Its growth was much the same as the rest had been, great exotic flowers spotting the green of the eternal fronds and palms and grasses; but we had eyes for nothing excepting the gigantic castle directly in front of us.

Surprising, eh? Well, imagine what we felt as that great grey pile loomed up out of the green vegetation like some medieval keep rising from its green moat!

Mr. Beller was the first to find his tongue.

"Coó-oo-*oo*-OO!"

"Exactly," I husked.

Then we heard the hissing of the snake break forth, like the father of evil himself in this Eden, and Kane said, "Ss-sso! *This* iss what it is, iss it? Ss-sso! And what will we find behind those grey walls, Doctor Gordon? Treassure, perhapss? Gold, iss it, or only ssilver? The lost rubies of Atlantiss? The hoard of a South Ss-ssea ruler of long ago?"

"How the hell should I know?" I barked angrily.

"Oh, you will not keep up the pretensse any longer, will you? Now that you have found it, or ssay rather we have found it, why keep your ssecret longer? Admit thiss iss what you came to find."

"I have no more idea of that thing than you have, excepting it seems to be a castle," I said irritably. I hadn't any idea what he was driving at.

"Are you going to sstick to your fool-tale of a flying horsse?" His sibilant

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voice grew louder and filled the air with a horrible unclean whistling. "Come, Doctor! The insstant I ssaw you get off that boat, sso obviously well-to-do, sso obviously eager for ssomething, I knew there was big rewardss in the offing. Vacation, I ssaid, here in the motu? Fantastic! Hsss-sss . . ." His voice trailed off in a hissing laughter.

"Why, you—you suspicious creature, you!" gasped Kitty.

"When men with money sseek out the little-known corners of the earth, my dear," he said, and as he spoke his long clean hands fumbled with the silver sash around his waist, "there iss alwayss more money there. When they go to the fashionable beaches, the watering-places and the casinoss, what profit iss there in following them? But when they put on old clothes and begin to delve and dig in the musty atticss and cellarss of this earth, then there iss profit in gold and fame to be had by following them. Therefore I sswam out beyond the reef yesterday, and hailed you ass you passsed me. Do you thing I, *I* who hold every championship in sswimming there iss to be had, could not have swum home? You amus-se me."

HE HAD untied the knot in his sash and now began to unwind it. Quick suspicion flashed into my mind, but before I could start forward he had uncovered Mr. Beller's immense revolver and was aiming it at me.

"No, don't move, Doctor Gordon, or I sshall regretfully put a bullet through your sstomach. Judging from the ssize of this weapon, the ammunition musst be as large as cannon balls." He twitched away several more layers of the incredible sash and dropped on the ground a neat little automatic and a short, thick throwing knife.

"Quite an arsenal," I said scornfully.

"Yess, I had no way of knowing Beller would be sso good as to provide me with weaponss of his own."

"Now what?"

"Now tell me exactly what it iss you are looking for in that ruined castle, or I shall—take ssteps."

I shrugged. "Go ahead and blast me, I can't tell you anything."

He regarded me thoughtfully. "Well, then, keep ssilence for a little. It can't do any harm. You can't esscape this island, you know, and I can find you when I want you."

He tucked the Beller artillery into the belt of his swimming trunks, cleaned his hands carefully on the sash, and gathered up his automatic and knife. "Adieu, dear Doctor. Au 'voir, little Beller." He turned and stepped out into the waving sea of grass. I watched his slim white figure growing smaller in the distance.

"Mad," I pronounced. "Mad as a hatter, mad as a March hare."

"Mad as a snyke," growled Mr. Beller. "What'd 'e mean?"

"He thinks we came here on purpose to find that castle. He never did believe we were simply roaming around looking for the Pegasus legend. He staged that swimming act to get into our boat. What do you know about him, Mr. Beller?"

"Ow, not much. 'E's been on Tinga-Tinga for six months or so, just sittin' around washin' himself and hissin' at people."

"What nationality is he?"

"Gord knows."

"Reptilian," said Kitty. "Of the royal house of Reptilia."

"That is a majestic pile, isn't it?" I said admiringly. The battlements of the castle were an unbelievable anachronism here on this deserted isle.

"Yes, let's explore it, shall we?"

"Not just now. We don't want to run into that devil in any dark dun-

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geons."

As we turned to retrace our steps to the spring, "He is nuts, isn't he, Val?" asked my wife.

"Quite mad, I should say. That cleanliness gives him away. He must be, or have been, a real heller, and it preys on his conscience. So he must be always cleaning and washing and scrubbing at himself like Lady Macbeth. Will all great Neptune's ocean, and all that."

"Frightening symptom." She shivered.

"What a situation," I said. "I only wish I had Lucille here. What a kick she'd get out of this! A flying horse (according to you two), a madman with a voice like a snake, a ruined castle on a South Sea island, a broken boat, a taboo lagoon, and a dizzy blonde and a drunken beachcomber."

"Who's dizzy?" said Kitty.

" 'Oo's drunk?" said Mr. Beller.

BEFORE the delicate Polynesian evening touched our forbidden island of Parena Mr. Beller and I, with Kitty in a flurry all around and between us and our work, had built a shelter a few yards from the spring; a cross between a native hut and a Canadian lean-to, of palm fronds and small tree-boles. Now, in the comparative coolness of the dusk, Kitty and I sat in front of it and talked idly. Even with a madman loose somewhere within hailing distance our calm could not be broken. It was a superb evening.

She was thoughtful. She had not seen the sight that Mr. Beller and I had seen, last night in the boat—that thing which I was able to convince myself now had been imagination and frayed nerves—but the hoof-marks and the spring and the name of our island had affected her sensitive nature deeply. I was far more ready to believe there was a real live mortal wild horse here on the island than I was to think that a legend had come to life; but perhaps she'd brooded over the old story more than I.

In a little while the fat beachcomber puffed up to the clearing and sat heavily down on the grass.

"Whoo," he sighed. "Just down lookin' at the—whoo—cutter. No good. Poor old Lydie Jyne. Whoo!"

"What about her?"

"I'm afraid I cawn't fix 'er. Poor old girl! Her and me's been through a lot together," said he sadly. "Nothin' to be done now, I'm afraid, but decent burial at sea."

"But—how do we get home?"

"Ow, don'tcher fret abawt that, Mrs. Gordon! We can 'ollow out a canoe, no trouble at all, and even make an outrigger. There's food 'ere, coconuts, sweet potatoes, fish in the lagoon and stuff, and we 'as all the time in the world—but it *will* take time. Two weeks, three at the outside, unless there's trouble with the snyke down there." *Chunk,* into the turf went the hatchet he was holding. "An' maybe we can 'andle him orl right, anyways."

"How far is Tinga-Tinga?"

"Not far at all. Forty, fifty miles, I guess. Go by way of Parualau Ino, I think. No 'urry. I been shipwrecked before." *Chunk,* went the hatchet.

"With a madman?" I queried.

"No, but with a dog that went mad. Wot a time I 'ad!" *Chunk.*

He rolled over and gazed meditatively down into the now-ebony depths of the pool. To me he looked like a fat little island god in silhouette.

I don't know how long after that it was, but the moon was not yet showing through the surf-smoke of the faraway breakers when Mr. Beller made an odd little gurgling sound in his throat.

"Doc!" he whispered softly.

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"What?" I whispered back across perhaps seven feet of space.

"Come 'ere, sharp! No, don't walk —crawl!"

Wondering, I crept on hands and toes to his side. Kitty followed me.

"Look," he breathed, "into the pool."

The night, not moon-lit yet, was still showing traces of the day's lingering glare, and was quite clear and cloudless. I gazed intently into the great sapphire hole, deep and deep, but could see nothing.

"See 'im?"

"I don't see anything in it. You, Kitty?"

"Huh-uh."

"No, no, not in it, *on* it! On the surface. . . ." He pointed a plump finger. "Like it was a mirror!"

THEN I saw it, and my wife saw too. I swore roundly at myself for a stubborn bullheaded unbeliever.

Have you ever watched a big bird, my dear Lucille, a great big white bird that was flying so high just after sunset that his wings were all crimsoned by the invisible sun? So very high that he was blazing with glorious bloody sunlight, the only thing in all the world that the sun was touching? Then you have a faint notion of what we three looked at in the pool of Pirene.

Only this was a horse.

Great Jupiter, what a sight! There, reflected in the dark water, was a splendid white stallion, sporting and prancing and cavorting on air with the aid of a pair of great silver wings, wings that the sun, a great philosopher's stone sunk beneath the horizon, had changed into molten gold.

There's no use in trying to describe any further that first clear sight we had of Pegasus. It's something that only three people now living have beheld, and . . . well, I couldn't do it justice. Perhaps, too, we're all a little jealous of our memory of that evening.

Anyway, there he was, the immortal winged horse, playfully prancing about on the atmosphere far above our heads, so far that his reflection was only the size of a water-skipper on the surface of the pool. I recalled that Bellerophon himself, the only man to tame this wonder, had seen him first in the water of a spring.

We were frightened then. It was as chilling as though the voice of Pan or Osiris had rung out behind us, this view of the equine immortal.

Maybe you won't understand this, old girl, but we didn't even look up! We all three crept away just as quietly as we could, and went to bed! We felt alien, trespassers on sacred soil. And if there was precious little sleep that night for Kitty and for me, there was even less for Mr. Beller. I remember, between dozes, hearing him mutter in a scared voice:

"Gorblimey! Gor-bli-me! *Pegasus!* The old boy 'imself. It's true. Lor, wot a sight!"

THE next day we gave up to loafing around the island. We passed by the screening trees at the castle end of the island, but we didn't presume to intrude on the privacy of Snake Kane.

It was late afternoon of our third day on the island when we saw the winged horse again. Mr. Beller and I were working—or rather, the beachcomber was working and I was attempting to help him in a layman's pottering way—on the disabled cutter. He had decided it could be salvaged, and we had consequently abandoned the canoe scheme. We were already at work on several long planks for the bottom: the tree from which we cut them I can't spell or pronounce even yet, but it has a most delicious odor.

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I don't know where my wife was. I have a notion that Pegasus was being sought for somewhere on the other side of the island. I'd given her strict instructions to hit Kane with a tree if she ran across him, and also to avoid the castle like the plague.

I'd laid down my hatchet and was sitting on the sand sucking down gulps of air—taking old ladies' temperatures doesn't create extraordinary muscles—and all of a sudden down came Pegasus, about thirty feet away.

You remember when we owned the stable, Lucille? And the glorious animals we had at one time and another? Well, I tell you this horse was the most magnificent beast I ever saw. He must have stood at the very least twenty-four hands high, broad and powerful to match, framed like an Arab. He was pure white from mane to coronets, with sleek skin stretching smoothly over ribs and strong flanks, perfect in each point as the ideal horse could be. The great silvery wings sprouted out just above his shoulders and below the withers. Their spread must have exceeded fifteen feet; he stood with them half-folded now, staring at us.

To this day I can't decide what that creature was—or rather what he is. Immortal, or very nearly so, he assuredly must be; for the Greek legends go back some thousands of years, the Polynesian ones much farther. Is he a sport, a mistake, a freak of one of Nature's playful moods? Was he spawned when Brontosaurus bellowed on the lava, or when Adam was naming the animals in the garden? The ancients said he sprang full-grown from the blood of Medusa's severed head. I could believe it. I could believe anything about him. And when the old gods died for lack of worshippers, did he remain on earth? Or—what? You must answer that for yourself, my dear, for I've given up long ago. All I'm certain of is: there he was, *the winged horse,* watching me intently on a stretch of coral sand on the island of Parena.

And while we're philosophizing, how did he ever come there? Is that his home, and did the legend spread with intrepid Polynesian voyagers even unto Greece? Or is he an immigrant from Greece, come to the silent seas to find peace? Or am I boring you to tears while you wait to find out what happened?

"I broke a stallion once," I said speculatively to Mr. Beller, my eyes on the quiescent horse. "Hardest part was catching him."

"There was a bloke on Tinga-Tinga once," said he in the same sort of voice, "a comber who'd been a cowboy in 'is youth. 'E was most almighty wonderful expert wif a rope thing 'e called a lasso."

"I've heard of lassos being made out of vines."

"And 'e taught me more than a bit abawt using 'em, too. More than a little bit. Yes."

"And if we caught this animal . . . ?"

"We might tame 'im."

"Why?" I snapped suddenly, curious to see what he would answer. His words surprised me, coming as they did from a rum-steeped little Cockney derelict.

"Ow," he said, "I don't know—just fer the sake of gettin' on better terms wif 'im. Why, he's im-mortial! Like a god—like a blooming god! Ain't that reason enough?"

"Best of reasons," I agreed.

"It ain't as if we wanted 'im for to, sye, stuff for a museum, or to show rawnd at circuses like a bloody freak—it's just a—ā—" he struggled for words to express the thought—"it's rather like a form of worship, in a manner o' speaking."

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ALL this while, though it was really much shorter than the time it takes to write it, Pegasus stood stock-still and quietly observed us. As we now stood up, he gave a little push at the ground with his ivory hooves and hopped up a half-dozen yards into the air.

"'E won't be took unawares," chuckled Mr. Beller. I noticed he looked a trifle chagrined.

"Come here, old boy," I coaxed persuasively. "Come on, no one's going to hurt you . . . come on, fellow, come, boy . . ."

Pegasus arched his perfect neck and whinnied a high-pitched call—of defiance or laughter, I'm not sure which. Abruptly he reared on his hind feet, whirled about and shot sharply up an invisible incline into the glare of the sun, and we saw him no more.

"Um!" said Mr. Beller, in a most noncommittal tone.

During the next week we glimpsed the winged horse a dozen times. Kitty spent her time crawling and grubbing in and out of the creepers and bushes in search of clues, while Mr. Beller and I made more noise at our work than I think the island of Parena had ever resounded to before, yet we saw the white steed three times to my wife's one.

As for our Snake Kane, we never saw him at all. He must have buried himself in the ruins of the inexplicable castle and remained there, rooting about like—well, like a snake. We didn't forget him, actually, but out of sight is always a little out of mind too, so gradually I neglected to warn Kitty about the castle end of the isle, and gradually she extended her sphere of sleuthing toward that forbidding sector.

I took to worrying more and more about having a relapse. She took all my professional orders just as seriously as she always had, listening with a cheerful scowl while I lectured and then forgetting all about it the instant I turned away. She *would* creep around in the dampest parts of the island in search of that blasted monstrosity! I grew more anxious daily to get her away and home again, at least to Tinga-Tinga where my medical supplies were.

Work on the cutter progressed excellently. We had made a new mast and fitted it, with infinite trouble, and the bilges were having their boards replaced one by one. So along about the ninth day of our sojourn on Parena we took the afternoon off and had a hunt, or as Mr. Beller (with vague memories perhaps of Anglo-Indian stories heard in his youth) called it, a shikar.

You see, Kitty had discovered several well-trodden trails through the forest which made her think Pegasus must use them every day or so; tracks being so thick we were reminded of the bridle path back home. A couple of times Mr. Beller and I had seen the horse fly down into the trees, and once my wife had been startled to hear him canter past not ten feet from where she stood, screened from her view by thick paraus. I suppose that, although winged and immortal, he is probably almost as earth-bound as the birds are, finding it necessary or convenient to come to rest on his island now and then.

Well, this afternoon we planned an ambush right beside his favorite trail; we drew lots, and I lost, so reluctantly I left Kitty and the Englishman beside the path and loped across the island to the farthest side, about a mile away. Then I started to kick up the most terrifying racket you can imagine. Shouting, laughing, screeching, banging on trees with a stick and even perpetrating a modicum of my pseudo-Swiss yodeling. I made it sound as though we three castaways had been joined by a large detachment of Marines and a couple of Coney Island barkers and pitch men.

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I bellowed and roared and howled and yelled until my throat was hanging down inside me in long strips. And presently I saw the flying horse, a speck in the distance, come swooping down in great wide circles and disappear in the trees. Our ruse had worked. I redoubled my noise . . .

WHILE they sat beside Pegasus' path Mr. Beller put the finishing touches to his vine lariat, and Kitty watched the sky. They could hear me over on the other side sounding like distant artillery.

"Mrs. Gordon," muttered the fat beachcomber, "your 'usband has simply *gotter* stay in the islands."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"Worse. About four years ago we had a French doc, a houtcast or something, not very good. He taught some o' the natives to bandage and stuff, but they aren't so good as what even he was. Then we 'ad a Chinaman, rare good but he died. Now there's no one worth mentionin', and Tahiti's almighty far to paddle a kid wif a gorblimey coral gash."

"Yes . . . Mr. Beller, I believe if you can get him to stay for a year, you'll have him for good. He doesn't really like Home that much, that he couldn't be happy here in the motu."

"And you?"

Kitty smiled gently. "Oh, I love them already! How could I help it?"

Mr. Beller dented his nose with his finger. "Coo . . . eryus!" he mused.

"Listen!" whispered my wife a minute after.

They froze like a pair of startled bunnies. The rustle of giant wings came down to them; Mr. Beller coiled his lasso swiftly and, his tubby body all tense and ready, rose to his knees. They waited.

Not many minutes after that they heard the steady soft plush-plush of his hooves on the turf, trotting down the green-fringed lane toward them.

"Wot a bit o' luck!" the beachcomber's lips formed the words ecstatically.

He began to swing his lariat, not too expertly, but in an approximate circle.

"Ah—ah—ah—" said Kitty suddenly.

"Ssssh!" frowned Mr. Beller, aggrieved. The soft pattering sounds came closer.

"Ahhh—" said Kitty desperately.

"Hey!" whispered Mr. Beller.

"Ahhhh—*Tcheeuw!*" sneezed the blonde girl.

"Now look whatcher went an' did," said Mr. Beller sadly, his lasso sinking to rest on the grass.

The noises began again cautiously. The lasso raised itself and began its swoop once more. Abruptly the sounds multiplied, grew steady, and Pegasus came pounding past them, head high and eye wild.

Mr. Beller flung the lariat recklessly at the galloping animal; performing something of a miracle, it settled about his ivory neck and drew taut, and with a wild cry our little beachcomber soared through the air after Pegasus, Kitty in pursuit. The horse thundered down the avenue of trees, Mr. Beller bouncing and scraping and flying behind him, with the lariat wound tightly about his waist, clawing frantically at it and crying hoarsely, "Whoa! Whoa, curse you, whoa! Whoo-ooa!"

Pegasus the immortal emerged shortly into a glade, and there, seeing his native sky above him, spread his wings in preparation for flight. Mr. Beller screamed madly at him.

"Whoa, I tell yer, you blasted heathen monster-osity, whoa! Stand still, you bleedin' myth!"

Silver pinions wide, Pegasus, ignoring the frightened little man behind him,

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lifted his great hulk into the air. Mr. Beller was instantly jerked up after him and Kitty had just time enough to throw herself at him and grasp him firmly around the waist before she felt herself lift off the ground with him. Luckily, the limit of the strength of Mr. Beller's vine rope was reached, exceeded, and with a straining screech it parted. Mr. Beller and the golden girl landed in a heap on the turf. The winged horse circled them contemptuously and flew out of sight toward the west and the slowly-dying sun, the shreds of the vine rope hanging from his neck like ribbons of glory.

The Cockney beachcomber sorted himself out and stood up shakily. He gazed accusingly at Kitty.

"You sneezed!" he said.

WHEN I had witnessed the westward flight of Pegasus I turned from beating on trees with a stick and headed homeward, home being our lean-to shack by the pool of Pirene. But I had taken scarcely half-a-dozen steps when I saw the pale white lean figure of Kane propped against a tree, the evil eyes staring at me speculatively.

"An infantile performance, Doctor Gordon," he said when he saw that I had noticed him. "Just what iss the purpose of screaming and beating the treess?"

"We're trying to trap Pegasus," said I in a surly tone.

He shook his head slowly, wonderingly. "Possibly you believe that, but I can hardly credit it, Doctor. Really, now! You beat upon the tree-trunkss with a sstick, you howl like an animal, or like Beller in the throes of a fit of the ssnakess, and you explain thiss by saying you are trying to trap a flying horsse!" He clapped his hands to his brow. "You will forgive me if I doubt you, dear Doctor!"

"Go ahead and doubt."

"In the firsst place, there iss no flying horsse."

"What? Haven't you seen him yet?"

He made an impatient gesture as if he brushed aside a foolish question. "Let uss not go on talking like babes in armss."

"Well, you saw the hoof-prints when we first came here, didn't you?"

He laughed, and even if I hadn't known he was mad I'd have realized it from that awful hissing cackle.

"I prefer," said he, "to believe the evidence of my scientific mind, rather than my fallible eyes. Ssupposing there wass a flying horsse, what power would motivate him? Do you realize that a flying horsse is impractical? He would have to develop ssomething like two thoussand horsse-power before he could lift himsself off the ground. If I had paper and pencil, I could prove it to you by the use of mathematics."

"Mathematics?" I snorted derisively. "And do you know that they've proved by mathematics that a bumble-bee can't possibly fly? And yet I saw a bumble-bee not six months ago, flying like the devil. And I saw Pegasus not six minutes ago, doing likewise."

He pushed himself away from the tree, laid a hand on the butt of the pistol that was thrust through his sash, and came up to me. His face was not a foot from my own. He grew visibly angry.

"Ss-see here, Gordon, I have been breaking my fingernailss and getting myself *filthy* in that castle of yours, and so far I've found about thirty centss worth of valuables. It'ss about time I forced you to tell me—jusst what iss it you came here looking for?"

"Peace," said I. "Rest. Contentment. Health."

He sneered and his tongue flickered

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over his lips, again so like a snake's that I wanted to leap back.

"You fool! I can take sstepss-ss!" he hissed.

"Go ahead and take sstepss-ss-ss!" I hissed right back. "You're an obvious lunatic, Kane, or you'd see I'm telling the truth."

For another instant he glared hatred at me, and then suddenly he was gone into the forest, making no more noise in his passing than a snake in the underbrush.

I strolled pensively back toward the spring, striking the sea very soon and walking along the water's edge, the setting sun flinging his blinding heat into my face. I was disturbed, of course, about Kane, but somehow his strange quirks of mind were too other-worldly and foreign to my experience to keep any great hold on my conscious thought. Presently I found myself looking out toward the passage in the reef and in the direction of Tinga-Tinga, and I felt that if I ever got Kitty out of this near-imaginary place and home again, I should never care to see the accursed lonely South Seas any more; and then I began to wonder what Pegasus was. And soon I found myself ankle-deep in soft warm water and the tide running past with smooth little ripples.

"Wake up, Doctor!" said I, and turned myself and my gaze inland and away from where the lacy smoke of breakers was screening the reef; the vivid green of the pohue creepers stung my sea-weary eyes sharply. I closed them for a moment. Somewhere above I heard a hail, and so went up to supper.

THAT same night we had a surprise visit from the winged horse. We had eaten—the eternal, infernal coconuts and fish—and I had retired into the shack and was examining Kitty's nose and throat by the light of our little coconut oil lamp. Her temperature was normal, but I didn't like the feverish look she had about her, and Mr. Beller's faithful report of her sneeze had worried me.

Even one sneeze . . .

I went after a while with my wife and leaned against the door, watching Mr. Beller look for Pegasus in the calm surface of the pool Pirene. He lay sprawled at full length as usual, like a sylvan unshaven god, pushing his button nose up with his forefinger. The moon had risen and the pool was black-silver in its light.

Mr. Beller arose a moment after we came out and motioned upward.

"'E's up there now—I see 'im, the blinking myth what drug me in the mud! 'E's comin' dawn, maybe to drink. 'Ere's our chawnst to get on speaking terms wif a bloomin' im-mortial." He slipped swiftly into the shadows. I drew Kitty back in the darkness of the shack.

"But you couldn't hold him today with a rope!" I whispered as loudly as I dared.

"Lemme get on 'is back and I'll 'old 'im!" answered the voice of the beachcomber, the little fat man who had never bestrode a horse in his life.

From the ensuing noises I gathered that Mr. Beller was cautiously climbing the trunk of an old and gnarled tree to the east of the pool. Soon I saw his silhouette against the moon crawling slowly along a thick branch until it could dispose itself comfortably in a forking crotch. Then it was still.

For perhaps fifteen minutes nothing stirred. Kitty giggled nervously. Then, light as a flake of surf-foam, the majestic flying horse came down beside the fountain of Pirene.

In the moonbeams his perfect form

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seemed twice its size; carven of ivory and alabaster, creamy and frosty like no animal a man ever saw before, he folded his silver wings and pranced delicately over to the inky pool. He flung up his head, ears erect. He stood so for a full minute—sixty seconds during which I wailed inwardly for my faraway camera—and then, as if satisfied, he lowered his head and drank thirstily from the spring. I watched, oblivious of the crouching shadow of Mr. Beller above him.

His belly full of his favorite drink (and I never saw him nibble so much as a blade of grass, so it may have been his food too), the horse threw himself down on the turf and rolled over and over in sheer delight. I nearly laughed aloud for joy to see that great winged creature kicking his legs in the air like a puppy. Again I felt like the ancient Bellerophon, kneeling at the shrine of this half-deity, this equine godling.

Eventually he tired of playing, though, and rose and indolently spread his wings to leave us. He neighed suddenly, breaking the deep silence of the Polynesian night and sending alarmed echoes leaping out of their beds here and there among the hills. I swear, I believe he was saying good-night to us who he thought were asleep! Without thinking I found myself answering him: "Good-night, old chap!" I shouted.

He stiffened. In that instant I saw part of the gnarled old tree detach itself and sail out in a high arc above Pegasus. Not to be caught like this, however, he seemed to sense the little man flying through the air above him and with a brief snort galloped a few steps and soared up at the moon. There was a shout of "I say—oooOOH!" and a tremendous splash, and the discomfited Mr. Beller sank from view into the heart of Pirene.

Well, of course Kitty and I couldn't contain our laughter another second; we simply doubled up and sat down and roared like two lunatics, rolling helplessly on the ground until Mr. Beller, all unaided, clambered from the pool and stood dripping over us.

"Gorblime!" said Mr. Beller severely, and a lot more that I shan't write. *"Gor-bli-me!"*

THE next morning Kitty had a severe chill.

I made her lie down on a lot of long grasses and keep still, and down the path and over the rocks I bounded to where Mr. Beller tinkered on the half-demolished cutter. He looked up as I lit beside him.

"Beller," I gasped without pausing for breath, "we've got to get back to Tinga-Tinga *quick!*"

"Mrs. Gorden?"

"Yes. Very sick."

He pondered. "Gimme four days and Jane's ready to go again."

"Four days! Man alive, if we're not back inside of four hours she hasn't a chance in a hundred."

He jumped up. "Good Lord, that soon?"

We were trotting up the path again. I explained quickly.

"At Tinga-Tinga I have morphia and alcohol, stimulants that she'll badly need in a few hours. There's nothing else I can do but give her those; about three-quarters of the people stricken with pneumonia get well without much help, some of them without even the necessities of life. But Kitty's had a bad attack already, and it's weakened her. Her heart will fail unless we get her to Tinga-Tinga before the fever and pain set in."

"How soon, again?"

"I won't be able to move her after about four hours. After that we must

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just take our chances of pulling her through without morphia . . . or alcohol."

"Which chances are—?"

"About one in a hundred."

"And with it?"

"A decent fighting chance. Perhaps one in ten."

"Coo-*er!*"

We cleared the forest and knelt by Kitty's couch. There were no signs of the terrible bloody froth on her lips yet, nor of the short painful coughs, for which I fervently thanked Providence. Mr. Beller writhed meanwhile in the throes of a great idea.

The little man went to the spring and reached a grubby hand deep into the pool's clear water. Hand over hand in came a long rope, and at last on the end of it Mr. Beller's precious small brown bottle. He shook it at me.

"Alcohol!" he cried. "Best you can get! I 'id it from the snyke down there. Must be half a bottle left."

He untied the rope and drew out the cork with his teeth. The bottle tilted up as he sampled a tiny swallow.

"Fsssh!" spluttered the little man, flinging the vessel away with a curse. "Oogh!" He glared at the cork and in a positive frenzy of anger he bit it in two. "Traitor!" he shouted. "So you'd let water in, wouldjer? Water! *Water!*"

We sat down together in response to a common thought and we looked at each other hopelessly.

"That was abawt the last chawnst," said Mr. Beller, striving nobly to hang onto his Cockney accent, but failing on some words.

I let my gaze wander over the island, the deep green woods around us.

"No, by thunder, it wasn't!" I shouted, bounding up and gesturing wildly toward the trees a quarter mile or so away. Pegasus was just settling to earth amongst them.

Mr. Beller for the second took a saner view.

"More than a week already and no luck . . ."

Kitty coughed. The beachcomber looked at me.

"'Ow long now?"

"Maybe three and a half hours," I answered.

Silently he put out his dirt-caked plump little hand. I took it. His button nose twitched in sympathy.

"Done!" he said melodramatically.

I watched him go in among the trees, and sat down to take Kitty's pulse.

It must have been twenty minutes later. I could do nothing for my wife at all, and began to feel that if I didn't walk or run or do something I should begin to scream my head off, so I took a turn down the path to the beach and back. I couldn't have been gone a quarter of an hour at the most. But when I came back to Pirene Kitty had vanished.

Gone! My eyes wouldn't credit it. I dashed to the rough bed of vegetation we had made her and dropping to my knees I felt all along its length. I peered into the lean-to. I even glanced into the pool. And then I threw back my head and let out an ungodly shriek.

"*Kittee!*"

Only the echoes answered.

I looked about wildly for some clue. Had she wandered off? Was she out of her head already? I saw nothing for a moment, but suddenly just beside the couch I saw it. A footprint, long and narrow, in the soft earth, a footprint made neither by my size nines, nor Kitty's dainty feet, nor Mr. Beller's fat little down-at-heel brogans.

Kane!

What the devil did it mean?

I stopped only to snatch up the little hatchet, and plunged madly into the

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undergrowth, heading for the castle.

AS I broke through the screen of trees, creepers, and other clutching wild growths that shielded the castle from sight, I heard a brief choked-off call. I knew as certainly as that I stood there with a hatchet in my hand that it was my wife. I pushed forward as fast as my legs would take me. It was only moments before I had reached the castle.

Automatically, involuntarily, I halted. I stood on a grey pavement which ran the length of the castle's front walls, a wide stone pavement made out of huge blocks cut from God knows what quarry in the long, long ago. By whom? Again, heaven knows, not I. So far as I could judge the architecture, it was medieval; but the blocks of the pavement and of the walls were of the titanic size that went into the pyramids of Egypt. It was a staggering sight. Even with Kitty's life in the balance, I was forced to stop there and gasp at it all.

I must explain, my dear Lucille, that there's nothing like it anywhere else in these waters; a great castle, complete with two towers and, for all I knew, a donjon keep, lacking only a moat to rank it with Europe's finest relics in its line. Of course, there are the statues on Easter Island, great terrible survivors of some past civilization; but this is something entirely different. Well, to go on:

I had come onto the pavement just opposite a tall door in the wall, a door standing ajar, its black thick wood cross-banded with heavy brass strips and on its center panel a finely-drawn picture of the head of a horse; I threw my shoulder against this remarkable door and shoved it open a few inches farther, giving myself just room to pass it and enter the castle. I found myself in a dim corridor which branched into half a dozen smaller halls all along its length. Choosing the nearest opening, I dived into it. In a second I stood blinking in a bright room like a library, made of the grey stone, it's true, but hung with curtains embroidered and painted with magnificent pictures and scenes of battle and legend; and in each scene the figure of our winged horse was prominent. Here he charged a horrible three-headed monster, there he led an army into battle, himself carrying a tall bearded man like a conqueror out of an Assyrian picture. I stopped dead and gasped with awe—yes, with real veneration—at the superb artistry that had draped these glorious veils against the cold grey stone. It was minutes before I realized how old they must be, for they were hardly more than so much dust—I happened to knock my shoulder against one of them and the entire structure crumbled to my feet, the scenes dissolving into multicoloured particles and then into a kind of half-substantial vapour. It was all like that in this amazing room: the furniture rotted and fell at a touch, the great windows had long been innocent of any curtains or glass, and the wonderful pictures that must have taken years upon years to weave and to paint, they were no more than so many spiders' webs waiting only the breath of a breeze to perish and disappear from my sight forever. I couldn't stay in that room long—it was like a tomb, a brightly-lit tomb incredible centuries old.

I dashed into the main hall again, thought to cry out my wife's name, and was shocked and frightened by the thousand and one echoes which came hurtling back at me the instant my own voice had died away. If anything, this awful booming and whispering "Kittee-ittee-teeee-eeee—" was worse

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than hunting her in silence, so I didn't call again.

OF COURSE I visited briefly every room along those halls. They were nearly all alike, except that in most of them Kane had evidently been at work searching for whatever his insane mind had conceived to be the secret of the place, and there was nothing left of the stupendous works of art that doubtless hung along the walls before he came. I cursed him over and over. When I did find anything still surviving, it inevitably had the winged horse Pegasus as the central motif. I began to realize that the people who had built and lived in this unbelievable castle had either worshipped the horse-god, or had been his proud owners. Everywhere, carved on the grey stone, etched into the walls and floors, inlaid in magnificent tiles in a giant bathroom, carved in wood and painted on doors and ceilings, his head or his winged body was evident. If anything could have done it, this palace could have made me forget that I was hunting Kitty. Perhaps it did for minutes at a time. But finally I had covered every nook and hole on the first floor, and found no trace of her; so I took the first stairs I came to and climbed upward.

Round and round they went, exactly like the Tower of London's grim staircase, round and upward until I emerged at the very pinnacle of the highest tower and gasped as the full force of the sun's rays pounded on my eyeballs. When I could see, I leaped to the breast-high parapet and looked down, leaning through one of the deep crenellations like an archer of the Dark Ages.

I stared down into an inner court, flagged with grey like everything else here, shaped like an egg and devoid of furniture or anything else except a dry fountain in the very center; the other tower was directly across the court from me, apparently the twin of the one I stood on, and yet now that I thought about it, I hadn't noticed any other stairs leading up when I made my frenzied circuit of the castle. I frowned. I must search that tower too. And, for that matter, where was the entrance to the court below? I hadn't seen that either. There were evidently secret staircases and entrances and perhaps sliding panels like the old English barons built into their own hideaways. I went tearing down the steps again.

How long I wandered about I don't know. I covered every room twice over, and by mentally constructing a three-dimensional plan of the place, decided that the only sections I hadn't explored were the second tower and the inner court. I had found no sign whatever of Kitty or Kane. I was blundering along, swearing continuously to myself in the nastiest kind of manner, when at last I tripped over a hook which projected like a firedog from a useless-looking hearth in one of the rooms, and as I fell I heard a great rumbling and creaking like chains and stones crushing down at each other. When I rolled over and sat up, fingering a bruised shin and shaking my head, I saw that one whole wall had swung down like a drawbridge into the pitch-black unknown interior of what seemed to be the tunnel to Hell. I didn't think twice, but jumped across the prostrate wall and walked rapidly into the hole. It was black, black as an inkwell, but by bumping occasionally into invisible walls and coldly damp stones I managed to steer a course which went down at an easy slant into the earth. Obviously it wasn't leading into the court or up to the tower, but anywhere might be Kane's den and I had to go on.

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I gripped my little hatchet and tried to whistle mentally. Blackness, blackness, with never a gleam of light . . . Dismal, growing-colder, dank clammy blackness, apparently this was—oof! I said as I banged up against something hard, and my nose began to bleed. Here we are. Where are we?

IT TOOK a full half hour for me to feel my way around that dungeon, for a dungeon it most certainly was. The fallen wall was, just as I had thought, simply a kind of mechanical drawbridge worked by counterbalanced weights, which led into an enormous underground tunnel which in turn fanned out into a wide jet-black dungeon such as you'd find under many a medieval castle. When I had carefully inspected by touch (a gloomy, panic-making method) every wall and bit of floor, I retraced my steps dejectedly and came out into the grey stone room again. I was disgusted and very downhearted. I had wasted a lot of valuable time pawing around in the dark, and now I had to start all over again.

But, by glory, I had a clue now! I whooped and lit out on a search for more projecting bits of metal. I found one almost immediately and, howling with fervent hope, I kicked it. All I got was a pain in the foot.

Another, and another, and a fifth projection, and still nothing, but the sixth was of a different mold. I hauled on it and again I heard stone weights and rusting chains groaning within the walls. What would it be, I wondered, and whirled to see. It was the court.

I emerged, blinded as before, and paced up and down the little egg-shaped court until sight returned fully. There wasn't much to see.

The fountain in the center was roughly shaped like a horse, a horse whose wings had long since been knocked off and lost; the water had come from his open mouth and fallen, doubtless with a pretty tinkling noise, into a great bowl at his feet. He stood, rampant and eager, with the poor pitiful stubs of his lost wings sticking out of his shoulders like vestigial bits of grey stone flesh. I could have wept for the poor fellow.

Well, the court was barren of anything else, whether lost sick wife or evil madman or clue to the long-gone owners of this place; so I was going back into the rooms when I heard a slight chuckle from above. It was like a snake laughing. I crouched as I turned, as if I expected a blow, and perhaps I did.

He was leaning over the parapet of the second tower, observing me cynically, his white shoulders and bare chest just showing through one of the deep crenellations. He held his automatic lightly in his right hand.

"Sso!" he exclaimed as I looked up. "You've decided to sstop playing and come out into the open? Well, good. Now sshall we talk business?"

"Where's my wife?"

"Oh, come! She's-s all right. Now, to business, eh?"

"Where's my wife?" I repeated between clenched teeth.

"Perhaps we could talk better if you were armed?" he said suddenly, and leaning over a little farther he dropped his automatic to me. My first impulse was to catch it, but some reflex made me jump back and it struck the stone floor just in front of me. I picked it up at once, snapped it open and saw it had a full clip, and levelled it up at him. But he was no longer alone. He held Kitty in front of him now, and even from below I could see her fever-scarlet cheeks and her parted, gasping lips.

He laughed again. "Now why did

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I do that, eh? The impulses of the moment, my friend. The dash of melodrama in my blood will have its-s little chuckle. Now, sshall we proceed . . .?"

FOR an insane second I calculated the possibilities of hitting what I could see of him; but he kept weaving about behind my wife's head and shoulders so that a shot would have been far too long a chance to take. I spoke to Kitty instead.

"Kitty! Are you all right?"

"I — yes, Val, I'm okay — sort of woozey, though . . ." Her tongue moistened her lips. ". . .Yes, really I feel f-fine, old boy."

"What's your proposition, Kane?" I growled hopelessly. Whatever it was, I was sure I couldn't meet its terms; this madman thought I knew something which I obviously didn't.

"Better, much better! All I want to know, friend Gordon, iss where the treasure iss hidden in the castle. S-simple, eh?"

"Yeah, s-simple," I said under my breath. I thought as fast as a shock-numbed brain overflowing with worry would travel. "Well," I said aloud, talking slowly and weighing my words, "well, Kane, I see you have me on the hip. I'll have to tell you."

"Right," he said agreeably.

"I—I was going to dig it up right away but you came here and I didn't want to let you know where it is, so—"

"Where iss it?" said the rasping snake's voice.

"It's—it's hidden in a dungeon," I said desperately. "It's buried just under the surface in the right-hand corner of a dungeon," and I went on to tell him how to get to the clammy cubbie-hole I'd stumbled upon earlier that day. When I'd finished he snarled angrily.

"Do you think to cheat me into handing you your wife after a tale like that? I've dug up every inch of that infernal hole."

"All right, then it's under the tiles of the bath. You start with the winged horse's head and count over—"

"Lies," he screamed out, "lies, lies! Are you going to tell me the truth or s-shall I . . ." and he dragged Kitty to the parapet and made as if to fling her over. I bawled at him with all the power of my lungs.

"Okay, you damned maniac, I'll tell you! I haven't the faintest idea what the hell you're talking about! Treasure, gold, jewels, pigwash, *I* don't know what it is! I think you're nuts, that's what I think!"

Literally foaming at the mouth, he flung the blonde girl from him. She must have fallen, because her head disappeared.

"You paltering nincompoop! Don't you know I have you at my mercy? I know you came here to search for the lost treasure of Parena! Didn't I come to the motu to look for it myself? Didn't I cover thesse little islands like a bloodhound? And didn't Fate hand you over to me all nice and fressh and s-stupid, to lead me here?"

I lifted the automatic as nonchalantly as I could manage to do it. He didn't notice, but went on raving.

"What poss-ssible reason could a rich man have here but to search for treas-sure? Answer me that, Doctor Gordon!"

"I came here to get away from it all," I said.

He brushed his twitching lips with the back of his hand. "S-see here, I'll give you a last chance. Where does your map say the sstuff iss buried?"

"I haven't got a map!" I howled.

"Then where did—"

HE SCREECHED and jumped back out of sight as my bullet clipped

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the grey stone parapet just beside him. I crouched down, making myself as compact and small a target as possible, and kept the little automatic trained on the top of the tower. In a moment up came his white head, features working convulsively, and I got in another close shot before he let fire with Mr. Beller's young cannon. I thought of the fountain and dodged behind it a fraction of a second in advance of his second attack. We exchanged a couple of just-as-futile shots. Quiet descended.

"Gordon," he called after a queer ominous silence during which I could hear the bird-calls from the trees outside.

"Yes?"

"I'm going to lift your wife up. Don't fire unless-ss you want to deprive me of a shield and yourself of a charming spous-se."

I held the gun ready, but I couldn't fire. The two heads appeared.

"Well, Kane?"

"Las-st chance! Where iss it?"

"I tell you, *I don't know,*" I yelled frantically.

His evil face peering down at me over my wife's shoulder, he leaned forward and rested his hand on the parapet.

"You intend to sacrifice your wife to thiss idiotic Pegasus explanation?"

"We were hunting the legend of the flying horse, yes. And we found him. But no treasure. Get it? No treasure. None."

His hand moved and he had to jerk back to save himself from falling forward. He let out a hiss of approval. "Aahh! I'll show you!"

Before I could bring up the automatic again he had pushed Kitty aside once more, grasped the great grey stone before him, and with the strength of a madman had lifted it away from its base. It had moved under his hand and the thought of smashing me for my insolence had instantly leaped into his twisted brain. I believe he had some kind of a god-complex anyway; and to crush me like an insect must have appealed at once to his gigantic ego. He held the enormous stone above his head, mortar falling from it in little chunks, and roared with delight.

"S-ss-ss-sso! Now you try my patience too far, Gordon! And you perish!"

He heaved the rock forward and down just as my gun barked. I saw a number of little pictures all at once: the grey stone hurtling through the air, growing larger and larger; a splash of scarlet like a flung tomato appearing as if by sorcery on his white, pale chest; and a sudden startled remembrance-picture of Mr. Beller somewhere out there, hunting vainly for a winged horse . . .

It struck the fountain. I saw the poor little wingless horse crumple before its merciless onslaught, and a piece which I did not see very suddenly made itself felt as it tore open my forehead. I reeled and fell. Blackness shut down for a period of unguessed length, and out of the mists I moved my head and tried to see where I was lying. I saw the ruined fountain and the great boulder, which had missed me by inches; I saw the feet of the stone Pegasus protruding from a pile of debris. I saw a great hole in the pavement just where the fountain had stood, and from the dark depths of this hole my uncomprehending eyes caught the sparkle and glow of gold and of multicoloured stones . . . I heard Kitty scream far away above me, and I heard Kane give a hissing gasp of pain and surprise. The blood ran into my eyes, and I fainted.

MR. BELLER walked a little way through the forest with his head

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down, reflecting on what he was to attempt. He meditated on the multitudinous sins of a life that now seemed shamefully misspent, and he gravely contemplated eternity. He mused on Tinga-Tinga and the natives who needed a doctor in the motu, and he thought of the two gay young people, the youngsters, up there beside the spring.

Suddenly he was running, pounding down the forest aisle toward either destruction and death or salvation for the blonde girl and the motu islanders. A pohue flung him, but he scrambled up and pelted on, ignoring his bruised knees and arm. He ran faster than he had ever run from his creditors.

He had passed the ambuscade of the previous day when a thought caught him by the shoulder and whirled him about. He selected a rough-boled tree, perhaps it was a coconut palm (he really didn't notice), and began to scale it rapidly. And now he grinned to himself for the first time in an hour.

"I 'ave a feeling," said Mr. Beller, "that I've did this before. Let's 'ope for better results this time."

He flattened his rotund form as well as he could against the trunk of the tree and settled himself to wait hopefully for the flying horse.

Precious minutes flagged by.

"My Gord," he thought, "ain't 'e coming this time?"

Presently the sound of great hooves striking the soft ground echoed rhythmically up to Mr. Beller. His palms were damp with fear; he dried them carefully on his shirt.

The winged horse trotted beneath him. The beachcomber took a deep breath and leaped.

The wind of his flight whistled in his ears interminably. Was he never going to hit?

He came down the horse's loins with a thump, not astraddle, but with his legs waving on the right, his hands on the left. In the eighth of a second before Pegasus could change his gait, the beachcomber had clutched a handful of lank mane and taken a death-grip on one mighty silver wing.

"Oohh!" wheezed Mr. Beller, the breath driven out of him with a gasp.

Not since Bellerophon had captured him with a golden bridle had Pegasus felt the weight of a human being. It must have come as a terrific shock, this crashing three-point landing of Mr. Beller's, because the horse took three or four galloping steps and then for just one breath stood still and did nothing but shudder. The Englishman flung his left leg over the broad back and, relinquishing the mane and the wing, locked his arms in a stranglehold about the horse's neck.

"Now," said he defiantly, "*now* knock me orf!"

There ensued what seemed to the beachcomber to be a short but interesting series of volcanic spasms, together with a small angry earthquake and several violent bellows of rage, and when quiet had descended and his steed for the moment was still, so that Mr. Beller was encouraged to open his eyes, he saw that they were about half a mile above the island and rapidly ascending higher. The great silver wings were beating with strong, steady sweeps, the horse's head was pointed toward the clouds and Mr. Beller was very, very giddy. It must have been just about then that his dilapidated sun helmet, declining aerial adventure, detached itself from his head and floated away, for when he again ventured to look down it was nothing more than a little speck against the green of Parena. He sent a fervent prayer aloft that the sun helmet's owner would not return to the island in the same way.

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WHEN he finally opened his eyes and kept them open it was to discover a world he had never imagined before. Far and away below him he saw Parena, a tiny emerald gem in the claret sea. The waters, sunned blood-red beneath him and bricky on the curve of the horizon, lay satiny-smooth without a white-cap to mar their beauty. Lacking anything nearby with which to compare it, the sun blazed a million times larger than ever it did on the ground; just to the right of the flying pair a layer of milky clouds swept swiftly by.

"Amiomio!" gulped the little beachcomber, looking down past a big silver wing.

They had soon risen above the level of the clouds and hurtled toward the sky. Swifter than an eagle Pegasus lunged for the sun, the man clinging to his back by no skill, but because cling or die he must. Once, Pegasus tilting his broad body a little more than usual, Mr. Beller had the horrible sensation that one sometimes gets on cliff edges, and would have dropped into the void; but the winged horse levelled just in time. His body was sloped no more than it might have been on a steep hill, as he ascended into the heavenly regions.

Mr. Beller generously called out, "This is plenty big 'igh enough, old 'orse," but was pointedly ignored. He began to recall dim phrases, "stratosphere" and "tropopause," and wondered if the immortal horse could possibly exist without oxygen. In that case Mr. Beller was for it. But finally, at an incredible height, Pegasus ceased his skyward flight and paused.

"Ump!" grunted Mr. Beller indignantly, venturing to slap the huge stallion on the neck, at which liberty the animal shied viciously, "show-off!"

Having reached the zenith of their flight, the absolute ceiling of the winged horse, the two drifted, hanging in the atmosphere for several minutes like a helicopter of radical design. Then Pegasus folded his wings and dropped earthward, though not so fast as he had climbed. He seemed made to ride in odd and special positions: there were his wings to wrap one's arms around at the places where the thick, strong shafts joined the body, there was his extraordinarily long mane to clutch, and there was his broad back which, flatter than most horses', made a good solid place to sit on so that one's heels just came half-way down his ribs. Still it was no joy-ride.

A short time later they were near the cloud bank again.

Pegasus had levelled off now and Mr. Beller might have thought him poised motionless had it not been for the beating silver wings that sometimes slapped his thighs sharply. He did not venture to unclasp his hands from the horse's neck.

When they had been flying steadily for several minutes the immortal steed turned his head to Mr. Beller for the first time and winked. At least, Mr. Beller claims he winked. The gesture was, in a way, a challenge, I think. The next moment they had veered sharply to the right and plunged into the milky bank of clouds. This was a new element to Mr. Beller.

They had looked like soft snowy velvet to the sky voyager. They felt now like cold, damp, foggy clouds and nothing else. Just at that time Mr. Beller was in no mood for rhapsodizing about clouds. They were wet and dismal.

Panic flew near the little man and grinned as he clutched with desperate, slippery, fear-dampened hands at Pegasus' neck. As though the hair were sanctuary he plunged his hands deep into the mane and clung, taken with a

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violent trembling.

PEGASUS then began to buck, systematically and not at all frantically. He did sunfishes and humped and buckled in the middle and, with more leeway than an earth-bound horse, did a couple of barrel-rolls and loops and tailspins. He neighed briskly, scenting the fear of his rider, and Mr. Beller's spine iced as Pegasus soared straight up and came over in a sudden back-somersault.

"Ugh!" grunted Mr. Beller. He was now sitting almost back on the horse's croup, the mane held in his hands like a rein.

Had Pegasus' bucking been truly scientific and one-half so expert as the meanest cowpony's, Mr. Beller would have lasted just about one-fifth of a minute, he and his valiant inexperience. As it was, he stuck pluckily and did pretty well—but when did Pegasus ever before find it necessary to buck, I wonder? And besides, the things that courage and fear combined will do for a man, well, it's amazing, that's all.

Mr. Beller glared in what he imagined to be the direction of the earth—all this was still in the cloud—and then he peered approximately at the sky, and wondered vaguely if he would ever see either again.

"Well," he said aloud, "if this is curtain time, it was worf it. But I'd give a thousand pounds—if I 'ad it—to be sure that Doc Gordon was staying in the motu."

He felt his mount go out from under him again, renewed his grip on the mane convulsively, and the crash and hammer and thump of the concussions began once more. At one more-than-usually-clever twist his hands slipped out of the tangled horsehair and for a sickening instant he grabbed air. But as he was sliding off the animal's left flank he encountered a wing and swung from it like a trapeze artist. His grubby red face clammy with fear-sweat and the mist of the clouds, his tubby body wracked with aching pain from his first ride on a horse (and what a steed to start with!), he had still the nerve to cling to his last forlorn hope, the silver pinion of Pegasus. He thought at first that it might shatter off from the horse's body with his weight, but he could have snapped a bar of steel more easily.

"Tinga-Tinga!" he muttered fiercely, gritting his teeth with the pain. "Mrs. Gordon!" With that he got into a royal rage at the winged stallion. "Damn you!" he shouted, his eyes wet, "that little girl down there dyin', and you who're all her hope of life playin' up 'ere in these blarsted pea-soup clouds! Oh, curse you, you bloody fable!"

Numb from elbows to finger-tips, at last even his great courage and resolve could keep him aloft no longer. Mr. Beller sobbed once and released the silver wing.

He shot into the brilliant light of day.

THE wind was whining past like a perpetual bullet. He clutched instinctively for his absent sun helmet, realized that he would be joining it in a few seconds, and looked up in time to see the flying horse dropping with super-lightning swiftness above him. He had a momentary vision of the two of them telescoping into themselves on some Pacific island.

Then the thing was over, done before he realized it, and done most cleverly. Pegasus slid under him at his own rate of speed, his pinions slowly unfolded and spread, and the two had ceased their hectic plunge and hovered above the scarlet sea.

"Gorblimey!" gasped the beachcomber, and fainted dead away.

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Without opening my eyes I tried to lift my head. It seemed that there was a great weight on it, or else someone was holding it down, because try as I would I couldn't raise it. Between the spasms of nausea I tried and tried, and at last I did it. There was some semi-liquid stuff on my forehead, glue or something, that adhered to the stone I lay on, but I managed to lift my head away at last.

When I opened my eyes I saw that the stuff was blood, smeared all over the grey stone flags of the court, and from the pain on my forehead it must be my own blood. I gave a little startled grunt. Then I saw the ruined fountain and the great piece of parapet and the scintillating jewels in their hole, and memory flooded back.

Strangely enough my first thought was for the treasure horde. Kitty and Snake Kane were somewhere at the back of my mind, but the important thing at the moment seemed to be those half-seen jewels in the cavity of the fountain.

Of course I was somewhat out of my head.

The first piece I pulled out was a long necklace of rubies and emeralds, set into filigree silverwork that was the loveliest thing man ever created. I gasped with awe-struck eyes popping, and my mouth fell open and stayed that way.

There were a number of pins, fashioned with old-style clips and clamps of gold and silver, and all set with hundreds upon hundreds of the precious stones. There were two small bluish metal urns with double rows of diamonds running around their mouths, and a tiny wooden casket which went to powder in my fingers, spilling a cascade of magnificent great pearls into my lap. There was treasure trove to make a man forget his gods and his friends, and hearken after the devil's preaching.

But not for long, in my case, thank heaven! I was startled and flung back to reality by the very next thing I withdrew from the hole.

It was a statuette, perhaps eight inches high, of the winged horse; its body was alabaster-white, of ivory, perhaps, yet of whiter and purer ivory than I ever saw before; its wings were wrought silver, every feather distinct and delicately drawn; its hooves were gold that caught the sun's rays and flung them back with a dull-bright golden gleaming; its open mouth disclosed teeth of white perfection to shame any movie queen, and its eyes were a pair of gorgeous sparkling rubies that lived as surely as any created thing ever did. I set it reverently on the grey flagstone, and sat back to admire it or perhaps to worship, I'm not sure which. And suddenly into my dazed brain flashed everything that had happened, and I looked up with a strangling yell at the second tower.

Kane's body hung, head down, over the parapet; Kitty was nowhere in sight.

I CAN scarcely recall a detail of the next period. I know I ran, or fairly flew, from room to room, trying to find the secret of that tower's entrance, but I ended at last in the court again, beaten and ready to acknowledge it. It had probably taken Kane the best part of the week to find that secret stair, and how could I hope to stumble on it in ten minutes?

"Kitt-ee!" I bawled, and again, "Kitt-tee-*ee!*" There was no answer. Kane's head lolled limply against the stone, as though he were trying to move but was physically unable. Blood crept down the tower from his wounded chest. If he were conscious, how he

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must hate that blood, he who was so confoundedly snake-clean!

I clung to the ruined fountain, for I was weak and quivering with my cut head and my terrible fear for Kitty, and my foot knocked over the little statuette of Pegasus. Distraught as I was, I could not leave that masterpiece lie on its side. I bent down and set it upright again. When I straightened painfully up, the first thing I saw was Pegasus himself settling to the floor of the court. I thought I was having hallucinations. I turned my back and opened my mouth to call my wife again, and then did the quickest double-take on record as Mr. Beller's well-known voice said, "Where *'ave* you been?"

I threw my arms around the little man who descended laboriously from the winged horse. "Beller!" I cried, "Beller, is my wife—" and did not dare to ask him what I wanted to know. He answered, anyhow.

"She's lying up on top o' that tower —wot goes on 'ere, Doc? You been 'aving a 'igh ole time, ain't you?"

"Yes. Can you get her down?"

"Why, cawn't you?"

"No, I can't find the stairs. Can you and the horse—"

"Right as rain. 'Arf a mo'."

They had circled my head and bulleted off to the tower's top before I was fully aware of their going, and shortly my wife lay at my feet. Her fever was high. Her eyes were closed, but there was still a chance.

"We'll have to get her back to Tinga-Tinga, old chap," I said to Mr. Beller.

"Yerss, and you too. Yore 'ead's a *mess*," said he reprovingly, as if I'd been playing with matches and burnt myself. "Let's get 'er up on his back, shall we?"

"Oh, wait a second. We can't leave Kane lie there in the sun. He's liable to fall off. I shot him in the chest. Can you bring him down?"

"Sure, but why bother?"

"Good Lord, man, we can't be so inhumane! He's a lunatic, after all, and the same as a sick man. Go bring him down like a good fellow."

"All ryte," said Mr. Beller, reluctantly, "but I don't like it."

While I did what little I could for Kitty the fat man and the horse went up and took Kane off the parapet. They descended into the court once more and Mr. Beller got off to help me with the blonde fever-stricken girl.

"First let's put this treasure back in its hole," I said.

"Ooohh!" That gives a weak idea of what Mr. Beller said, but it's the nearest I can come to it. "Wot's that?"

"It's what Kane thought we were searching for. He must have got wind of its story before we came to the motu, and jumped to the conclusion that we'd heard of it too. Poor devil! He certainly got his, didn't he? Look at that chest."

"Wot chest?" asked Mr. Beller, turning around.

"Why, that—" said I, and stopped. There was no chest, no Kane, no Pegasus!

"Up there," said Mr. Beller. I, shielding my eyes from the sun with an upflung arm, spotted them in a moment; the horse had risen to a height of possibly two hundred feet and was circling the island. In a moment he had flung himself out over the ocean and calmly done a sidewise roll. His unconscious rider slipped off and plummetted down like a sack of lead. The walls of the castle hid him from our sight before he struck the waves of the ocean that was his grave.

As the horse dropped softly down to us again, "How do we know he w-won't do that to us?" said I.

"Ow, don't you fear! 'E's my pal,

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'e is! 'E knowed old Kane was a varua ino—that's one o' them evil spirits—and 'e done what I'd 'ave done if I'd had my own way. Well, where's the 'arm? Come on, get aboard!"

NOW there's little left to tell, Lucille my dear. You'll have guessed the end long before this, since I'm writing you in such a happy vein. Of course Kitty is well; we fixed her on the horse's back as comfortably as we could manage to, and we all flew back to Tinga-Tinga together, Mr. Beller up on the "prow" neck-reining Pegasus with slaps, I back on his loins praying that he wouldn't jolt me off. There's one more scene I want to tell you about, and that was our parting from Pegasus . . . for part from him we did.

We had come down on the beach of Tinga-Tinga Island, not too many minutes after we left the corral beach and ruined castle of Parena. Kitty lay on the green fringe of grass between the shore and the trees; I stood beside her. Mr. Beller had gone back to the winged horse and thrown an arm around his great ivory neck.

"Parting o' the ways, old chap," he said softly and mournfully. "So 'ere's where we split it—blimey! but I wish you could stay, though!"

"But why shouldn't he stay?" I asked idiotically. The little fat man who looked like nothing more than a rum-rotten derelict turned on me fiercely.

"Yes, on Tinga-Tinga! And the natives'll ride 'im, and all the babies—bless their hearts, though—will pull 'is ears, and everybody will 'ave a great old time. Won't they? And the next native as goes to Tahiti will tell the world all abawt the wonderful flying 'orse we 'ave 'ere, and other natives will start to flock in . . . And then your damned white men, combers first, like me, then scientific gents, and tourists, to see if he's real . . . And soon what'll you 'ave? A circus man or an animal-stuffer, come to bag 'im down like a blooming rabbit in a bush! And he, trustin' me because I rid 'im and made friends with 'im, and afterward loved 'im like a brother, *he* will be stuck into a cage to be gawked at for tuppence a throw!"

"I'm sorry," I apologized. "I just didn't think when I said it."

"And I'm sorry too, for speakin' that sharp, but—I'm 'is pal, don't yer see, and so he's got to 'ightail it off at once before the natives catches sight of 'im."

He turned once more to the immortal horse, and, am sure, forgot my existence. His red-rimmed bloodshot eyes were wet as he embraced Pegasus about the neck for the last time.

"Myth or not," he cried softly, "legend or no blinking legend, you're the realest friend I ever 'ad, and I've known you too short a time! But will you go now, old boy, quick? Will you fly back now?"

Pegasus nuzzled him with the great milk-white nose gently, and then, understanding better than I had done, he rose and circled us once. A sorrowful whinnie floated down to our straining ears, and he was gone.

IT WAS two weeks after that—three nights ago—that Mr. Beller and I sat on the sand of Tinga-Tinga and he told me the story of his ride as I have written it to you. What happened when he regained his senses, after that sensational plunge, he wouldn't tell me.

"It's like this," he said, his Cockney accent stronger now that he had leisure in which to remember to use it, "I can't say as how *anything* really 'appened; it's just that when I woke hup and seen 'im lookin' over 'is shoulder at me, and sort of smilin' like, I—I come over all

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funny, I did, and—well! I mean, 'e understood, and so did I, and—an'—then we went lookin' for you, and an 'ell of a time we 'ad locating you, too!"

Willful inarticulateness, I call it. But whatever it was that passed between the two, immortal winged horse and brave mortal man, it made a stronger bond between them than I can indicate in writing.

Kitty? Oh, she pulled through with flying colours, just as she does everything, thanks this time to Mr. Beller. We've promised the little Englishman that we'll stay in the islands for a year and try the life as motu doctor and nurse. We both think that's the irreducible least we can do.

Kitty and Mr. Beller, those two indefatigable conversationalists, are chattering beside me, and a piece of dialogue has just been finished which may well end this over-long letter.

Kitty remarks, "You know, the first mortal to ride your Pegasus was a chap by the name of Bellerophon. I think I'll just lengthen your monicker and call you Mr. Beller*ophon,* too."

Mr. Beller replies with a naive statement that puts this whole tale into the realms of unbelievable coincidence.

"Oh, but Miss, I mean Mrs. Gordon," he says. "That is my name, though I'd forgot it till you spoke. Eustace R. Bellerophon. I took an' shortened it a long time ago—it was 'way too long for comfort, you know, and besides, it didn't seem to fit me, some'ow—it didn't seem, as it were, appropriate!"

Epilogue

SUNSET. Once more the glorious beauty that dwells only in the South Seas has touched the little motu with its splashes of vibrant colour that transform them into fairy lands.

Sunset, and down the village road of Tinga-Tinga pelts a little round man in dirty dungarees. Clutched to his bullet head is something that may conceivably have been a sun helmet once in the distant past. He carries a small brown bottle.

Panting, just keeping ahead of the crowd of laughing Polynesians who pursue him, he flies along the road and comes at last to a grove of tall pukatea trees. The pursuit drops off and goes its several ways, chuckling. This chase sequence is a long-established ritual.

Just by the grove of shading trees, built on the coral rock and overlooking the beach and the sea, a neat white board house roofed with the regulation corrugated iron seems to watch the southern sky expectantly. By the front door of this neat small dwelling the podgy runner drops and lies drawing in the air in huge gulps.

A tall, black-haired, lean, youngish-looking man comes to the open door and looks down at him, grinning. The grin makes his face most attractive.

"For such a rum-infested fat little man, you run remarkably well, Mr. Beller," he says.

The little fat man in dungarees disdains to answer. He speaks instead to the golden-haired girl who now comes out of the clinic-hospital-home, drying a pair of test tubes on her apron.

"Saw 'im again lawst night, Mrs. Gordon, and 'e flew acrost the moon twice. I almost hollered at 'im, but I was scared I'd wake some native."

"Mr. Beller," says Doctor Gordon, thoughtfully pulling out a pipe and beginning to pack it, "what d'you say we take a trip to Parena one of these days? After Mama Rane gets well, and . . ."

"And after Arai has her current baby, and after you've done worrying over the Umiki boy, and after—oh, after a million million other things are

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over and done with, then we can go back and see *him* again!" his wife bursts out, half amused, half in earnest. "I tell you, we'd better go back again sooner than that! Lucille keeps asking us about *him,* and all we can say is we're thinking of him all the time and planning! We've waited now—why, we haven't been back once! And how long is that?"

"Let's see, the boat's due in six or seven days . . . That makes it either three years or three years and six months or four years we've been here."

"Four years! And not out of Tinga-Tinga and the thirty-six other islands once! Not even to Tahiti, let alone to Parena. You fool, you'll simply kill yourself working . . ."

"You call this work? Don't be such a ruddy village idiot!" he exclaims fondly.

The golden girl collapses beside the tubby beachcomber, shrugging.

"Speak harshly to him, Mr. Beller," she sighs. "I can't do a thing with him—and after all these long years!"

"We'll go back soon," says the doctor again.

"Yes, we must! I never even met Pegasus socially, you know. I was out cold. And there's poor mad Kane's treasure. . . ."

"It's not Kane's treasure. It still belongs, as far as I'm concerned, to the people who built that impossible castle and made those improbable draperies and worshipped our friend the immortal horse—that's why I left it all there, even when I'd have given my right arm for that statuette, and that's why when we do go back we'll fix the fountain again so no one will ever find the jewels and take them away . . . It's *his* island, *his* spring, *his* castle, and by all that's sacred they're *his* treasures!" His voice, raised as if in anger, trails off.

No one speaks for perhaps five minutes.

"We'll be going back any day now, never you fear," says the grubby little beachcomber with the small brown bottle. "One of these fine days *'E* will come to us, if we don't go to *'im.* And I left my cutter on Parena, too—poor old Lydie Jyne! No, it's all right, Mrs. Gordon, we'll be going back any day."

The tall doctor gazes wistfully out to where the waves are making breakers against the reef.

"Yes," he says softly, "we'll go back and see the old boy. Just wait until Arai has her baby . . ."

THE END

ORIGIN OF SOLAR ENERGY

By JON BARRY

ONE of the most baffling problems connected with the sun is the origin of its tremendous heat and energy. The most reasonable theory was put forth by Prof. Eddington who said that at the center of the sun, electrons and protons, the fundamental units of matter, are being completely annihilated by collisions with one another and their substance turned into energy. It is difficult to realize the tremendous amount of energy released by the sun. The earth receives less than one two-hundred-millionth of the energy sent out, yet the energy received by each square yard of the earth's surface is equal to one and one-half horsepower.

Perhaps when the earth's supply of coal and oil gives out, we will be forced to turn to the more direct energy of sunlight. Some attempts have been made to use the sunlight by systems of mirrors which concentrate it on boilers of steam engines, but they have not been more than three percent efficient. There is no reason why the progress of invention will not eventually overcome this problem, and the hot deserts, now the wastelands of the earth, will be the scenes of great industrial activity, and the sun will aid mankind to carry his civilization to undreamed-of levels.

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The HESITANT ANGEL

by LARRY STERNIG

Some men solve their own problems—others ask for help from friends—but a few have guardian angels

CELESTIAL radiance.

A thing like that makes one want to talk, and Gorski was the only one I could think of. Gorski didn't have a sense of humor, but he had everything else. Even money, though heaven knows where it came from. He didn't try to paint like the rest of us. You might say he made a career of not painting in a studio.

"Gorski," I said to him, "if a man thinks he's going crazy, that's pretty good proof he isn't, huh?"

"So they say," he said.

He took a long look at me, and then produced an amber bottle plugged with a piece of candle. He put it and two goblets on the table between us.

I'd been merely toying with the idea of confiding, but now I knew that I would. Not abruptly, though. With Gorski, the shortest distance between two points was a long curve with several tangents.

"So they say," I echoed. "But is it really so?"

He filled our goblets, and then pushed the hair back off his forehead before answering. "What 'crazy' means you tell me first. Then I tell you whether a man knows he is going."

I was ready for that. "Not to be technical," I began, "Let's say 'crazy' means seeing things that aren't there."

He jerked his thumb at a canvas standing in the corner, one I'd painted myself and brought over for his opinion.

"What see you there?" he asked.

"A warped, stunted tree overhanging a vertical cliff, against a background of drifting—"

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I thought I saw a faint shimmer as I raised the gun to my head.

He waved me imperiously to silence. "Not there. Not there at all. Flat canvas stretched over a frame and daubed with various oily pigments. No tree. No cliff. But you see them; crazy that makes you, no?"

I grinned. Tangent one; I'd have to backtrack to the main curve. "Those things I see subjectively," I argued. "They are matters of interpretation. Other things I see objectively. But—" I felt myself nearing the last bend of the curve "—what I'm talking about is a celestial radiance. That's neither subjective nor objective, or else both."

Gorski let the radiance alone and lit

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on the "both," which was just like him. So I explained: "The radiance part seems objective, but the celestial part is certainly subjective. I mean you can see a radiance objectively, but if it conveys the idea of being celestial that part is certainly—Oh, you know what I mean."

"Perhaps," sad Gorski. He picked up his glass and took a long drink. "And now that we have beaten the bush about, suppose you tell me of what you speak."

I absent-mindedly reached out for my own glass, and there was that dratted shimmer again, to the left of the table this time. It might merely have been imagination, but anyway I pulled back my hand and didn't take the drink.

"A month ago it started," I told him. "That night after the party at Rene's place. Remember? I got drunk, stinkingly drunk."

"So bad you didn't seem when you left, my friend."

"That was just about when I started drinking seriously. And I had an edge even then. Maybe I didn't show it. Anyway, I went on to—oh, let's skip the details. I got drunker than I'd ever been before. But I knew what I was doing. I wasn't seeing things, get that."

"Except celestial radiances?"

"Well, yes, but that wasn't because I was drunk. I've been sober ever since and—"

"When last did you see it?"

"Just now. When I reached out to pick up that glass of wine. *She won't let me drink,* Gorski. It's an outrage, a damned—Ouch!"

Gorski was looking at me somberly. "First, why do you say 'she'? And second, why do you say 'Ouch?' "

"Well, I don't know exactly—I mean in answer to your first question. But I've a hunch that she's a she. I just sort of feel it, that's all."

"You mean that *she* won't let you drink, so she must be a she, and that if he wouldn't let you drink, it would be a he?"

HIS expression was so deadly serious that I burst out laughing. "Gorski, old man, that's it exactly. Although it's sure a hell of a—Ouch! Damn—Ouch! Swear for me, Gorski."

"It would be useless. But hurt where does it?"

I leaned back in the chair and concentrated with my eyes closed, trying my best to give him a coherent answer. "Nowhere," I said, "and everywhere. It's—it's like somebody sticks a pin into you only you don't know where." No, that didn't express it at all, and I tried again. "It's like—" I bogged down completely; that just wasn't any simile for a pain that one gets physically and feels physically.

"Your conscience, perhaps maybe?"

I snorted. "Conscience? Phooey! That's silly, and you know it. There's nothing wrong with taking—"

"Go back to going home from Rene's. Drunk you were. Then?"

"I staggered right smack in front of a truck. A big trailer van. And—"

Gorski tapped the table with a spatulate finger-tip. "And missed being run over by an eyelash," he said. "A quick feeling you had as though something or someone pulled you from the wheels away. There was a flash of radiance and—No?"

I was gawking at him. "How the hell could you know?"

He stood up and waved his arms. "But it was obvious. Celestial radiances, you talk about. And swear you can't. You haven't dared drink. And then, it comes out a truck and a narrow escape, with celestial aid! My

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friend, what but a guardian angel could you have?"

I closed my eyes again. I'd known it myself. But in words, in English—even Gorski's English—it scared me stiff to hear it.

"But you know that's silly," I protested. My voice must have sounded plaintive. "There aren't—there can't be, literally, I mean—It's impossible. They don't—"

"Why not?"

"Well, because—" I grasped at a straw. "If there are, why can't other people see them?"

"I know a man who has web toes," said Gorski seriously, "So why can't other people have them?"

"But other people do have web toes, occasionally. Not often, but there *are* cases."

"And what leads you to think you are unique completely? Many people have angels seen. Jeanne d'Arc. Robert Wescott. Elijah."

"Yes, but that's—"

"Oh, there are modern cases, maybe, too. Most of them, like you, do not talk about, except possibly to a friend like myself. The others—in asylums they are."

I shuddered. "Then if they're crazy, I am too."

"No, no, no! But crazy you would be to talk about it to others. They might not in angels believe."

"Do you, Gorski?"

"I would if one I saw. And you say one you've seen."

"You mean you don't believe yourself, but you believe if I believe, then you'd—" I gave it up. Arguing with Gorski always gets me going in circles.

I went down to the street and tried walking in circles instead. I wished that I'd had the courage to tell him all of it, once I'd started. But, close a friend as Gorski was, I'd known him only a couple of months.

And if I told him, he'd *know* I was mad. Stark, raving—

I walked down Race Street to Third, and down Third to South, and down South to Twentieth, and back again to Race, and there again was the building that held Gorski's studio.

I WALKED past it, got half way around my loop again, went into a drug store, and called him up.

"Listen, Gorski," I said.

"I listen."

"Listen, I didn't tell you all of it; I didn't even tell you the worst of it."

"I know," he said calmly. "In love with her you are."

I stood there looking at the telephone for about a minute, and then I hung the receiver back on the hook.

I went around the loop again. This time I got to South Avenue before I went into another store and dialed Gorski's number. He didn't answer by saying "Hello." He just said, "Even though she won't a drink let you take or swear?"

"Yes," I admitted. "It's just that way. Look, Gorski, no matter what she did to me, it would be that way. I—I just don't know the words for it, but she's beautiful beyond anything I could compare her to. Like—like nothing else at all. She's radiant, wonderful, marvelous, and her eyes are—"

"Then you've seen her?"

"Just once. The first time, the time I was stinko and she pulled me out from under the truck, Gorski. And then it was just a glimpse, but—"

"And since then?"

"No. The flash of radiance, a glow, but nothing more. It's, well, it's like a rainbow with more colors in it than there are, but that isn't like seeing

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her like I did the first time."

"And you want again to see her? That your trouble is?"

"Yes." An inadequate monosyllable.

"Then drunk why not get again?"

"But she—I told you about the pain I get when I even reach for a glass with something alcoholic in it!"

"But, my friend, too excruciating is it to bear? It hurts to go to a dentist, and one goes. Purely as a scientific experiment, try why not to see—"

"Gorski!" I yelled. "You're a genius!"

This time I didn't bother to hang up the receiver at all.

There was a tavern next door. I gave my order to the wizened little bartender as I rushed in. "Loch Lommond and a beer for wash!"

"Vurra good, sorr. Unco fine taste ye have for so young a gentleman. Except, sorr, for the wash. *Beer* with a fine whusky like—"

He was right, of course, but not for the reason he had in mind. Just as Gorski had been right about the pain not being too great to bear, when I was ready for it. There was a stab when I picked up the glass and downed it, but dentists have done worse to me. Yes, I could take it.

But wherein the bartender was right was that the beer, being alcoholic, brought the same reaction as the Loch Lommond. Unfairly, the pain was not justly proportioned to the alcoholic percentage. It was as bad for the lamb as for the sheep.

"You're right, Scotty," I told him. "No more beer. But make the Loch Lommond double this time." If the percentage failed to work one way, it would fail the other. No worse for a double Scotch than for a single.

"'Tis mighty fast, sorr, to be downing such strong drink."

"Triple then, Scotty, and if you think I'll explode just stand aside."

He poured it reluctantly. "Are ye thinking of getting drunk, sorr?"

"Of nothing else," I admitted. "Uggh!" A triple Scotch, sans chaser, is something to uggh about even without psychic repercussions. But it works quickly. There was a stuffed raccoon on the shelf back of the bar, and I could have sworn it winked at me in a way I didn't like.

"SCOTTY," I asked, "did you ever see an angel?"

"See one, sorr? I married one."

I gripped the edge of the bar. "Quick man, tell me—how'd you meet her?"

He smiled. "'Twas at Coney Island, on a hot summer night. She'd gone there with her folks and—"

"Oh," I said, in bitter disappointment. Then my sense of humor returned and I winked at the raccoon—and ordered another triple Scotch.

He paused with the bottle half raised. "If ye're bounden to get drunk, sorr, that's yer business, and if I chase ye oot, ye'd get it elsewhere. But hadna ye better give me the telephone number of some friend who can come around and—"

I gave him Rene Clair's. I figured I'd bothered Gorski enough for the day, and anyway Rene owed me a few cab rides. Then I braced myself for the psychic and physical jolt and downed the drink. The room was beginning to move, not in circles, but slowly back and forth like an undulating pendulum, if there is such a thing as an undulating pendulum.

I reached for another drink that had got there somehow.

"SHCOTTY," I said, "The world ish a shnare and a delusion and there are more thingsh in and around it than Horatio Alger ever dreamed of in hish

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philo—philoshol—ah, you know what I mean."

"Yuss," he said, nodding gravely. "You mean, it willna be long noo." The stuffed racoon jumped from the shelf onto the bartender's shoulder and perched there twittering, then jumped down on the bar. I had an idea I was going to have trouble with it.

It was dark when I opened my eyes but an alternate glow of red and green light coming in at the window told me where I was. There is an alternating neon sign across from my studio that gives it a Dantean effect when the room is otherwise darkened.

I seemed to be dressed, except for my shoes and coat and tie, and my head felt like the devil was in there trying to get out.

I sat on the edge of the bed and groaned. It hadn't worked. I'd gotten drunk—drunker than I'd ever been before, and it hadn't worked.

I said, "Damn—Owww!" Well, I still had a guardian angel.

I got up and turned on the light. It was four a. m., almost dawn. My mouth felt like the inside of a sewer after a long drought. I felt a little better when I'd brushed my teeth and washed and put the rest of my clothes back on.

I called up Rene. "Thanks, pal," I said.

"You drunk again?"

"What do you mean, again? It couldn't have been more than six hours ago you brought me home."

"Six? You mean thirty; twenty-four *and* six. And listen, I took a fiver out of your wallet to square with a guy for a raccoon, a stuffed one. You tore it up because it bit you."

"Uh," I said. "Listen, Rene, any angels around?"

"Migod, Bill, you still got 'em? That's all you raved about. Look, pal, over at Hillcrest they got a psychopatic ward that's a dilly. Up to date and—"

"Thanks, Rene; I'll see you there."

I hung up and sat down on the edge of the bed again.

There *had* to be an answer. I'd seen her once, it could, it must! happen again.

MY STUDIO is reasonably soundproof if the windows are closed, and I went over and closed them. Then I said, "Listen, Angel, you're around somewhere, and maybe you can hear me. Won't you show yourself again?"

"Please," I implored. "I won't hurt you. I—I wouldn't harm you for anything. I—why, da—darn it, I *love* you! You're more beautiful than anything on earth. You're what people think they mean when they say 'heavenly' but they don't know really and I do because I saw *you*.

"I—I know I don't deserve it, and that I'm just a louse and all that, but I want to see you again, Angel. Please."

And still nothing happened.

I called up Gorski, hoping I'd waken him out of a sound sleep, but doubting it. Gorski seldom sleeps; anyway I've never caught him at it.

"Hello, Brain," I said. "It didn't work."

"No?"

"No."

"Drunk did you get?"

"One could call it that."

"In front of a truck did you stagger again?"

"No, you dope. Why should I—Wow! Gorski, *that's* what happened before, wasn't it? And that *is* what a guardian angel is really for, mostly. Gorski, you're a wonder. You're a genius!"

"Of course."

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"I mean it."

"My friend, so do I."

I replaced the receiver and tried to calm down. I thought I had it, but the question was—what was I going to do with it? I'd gone off half-cocked before and all I'd succeeded in doing was losing a day and a half out of my life. This time I was going to think it out first.

I went to the window and looked out. My studio is on a quiet side street, with no traffic at that hour of the morning. By walking two blocks to an arterial, I could find all the traffic I wanted, but was that the best answer?

I hoped there was a better one. If I ran across in front of a car, would she appear—in visible, tangible form, as before—to save me from danger? Yes, I thought she would, but it would be just another momentary glimpse.

The danger I'd be in would be great, but it would be of brief duration. There wouldn't be time to talk to her. And unless the driver of the car was a hit-runner, he'd be coming back to see if I was all right, and—

No, there must be some form of *sustained* danger that would give me time to look at her, to talk to her. Perhaps something that could be accomplished right here in my own room, in privacy. Yes, this time, I was going to think out a course of action without going off half-cocked and—

Half cocked! That was it. I had a hair-trigger automatic in the top drawer of my desk, one I'd purchased a few years ago when I'd become interested in target shooting and had joined a gun club.

I took it out of the drawer, and got out the rod and rags and oil for cleaning it, and the box of bullets that fitted it. I took out the clip and loaded it, then slid it back into the gun, as though to be sure that it fitted perfectly.

Then, as though inadvertently and trying to keep even myself from realizing what I was doing, I pulled the slide back and forth—which pulled one cartridge up into the firing chamber of the gun. Then I removed the clip—to all intents and purposes unloading the gun, but actually leaving it cocked with one bullet in the chamber. All set for cleaning—by a fool who needed a guardian angel.

I WORKED a bit of rag into the slot of the cleaning rod, and poked it down into the muzzle. I thought I saw, before me, just a faint shimmer of that celestial radiance. I glanced up out of the corner of my eye—just a glow, and I wanted more than that.

I swung the muzzle around so it pointed toward me, swabbing the rod up and down in the barrel. The spot of brightness became brighter. Well, I was on the right track, but not in enough danger yet.

My blood was pounding in my ears as I swabbed that rod up and down, this time hard enough to strike little blows against the nose of the bullet in the gun.

I thought I heard a faint sound that might have been a gasp, but I kept on. This time without looking up at all, I reached around with my left hand and changed my grip on the gun so that one finger rested lightly—ever so lightly—against the hair trigger.

And, as I worked the swabbing rod, I made the pressure just a bit less light. And this time there *was* a gasp, and it was a feminine gasp, and a hand came out and touched the muzzle of the gun, pushing it aside so it no longer pointed exactly at my head.

For a moment I didn't quite dare move or breathe. It was a hand more

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beautiful than a hand can be—delicate, exquisite, tapering. And real or not, it looked quite solid in an ethereal sort of way.

It felt real, too. One finger touched one of mine and from the point of contact a flow of something like electricity, but profoundly more exciting and pleasant, seemed to come over me. Something that I had never felt before.

There was a wrist beyond that perfect hand, and a white, rounded arm. My eyes followed it and I looked up into her eyes, and the universe stood very, very still.

Her voice was not like tinkling silver bells or like anything else except her voice. "Why do you do a dangerous thing like that?"

"I—to see you. I thought you'd come."

"I heard you talking to me before, but I couldn't come then. You—you talked about love. What is that?"

There was something in my throat that kept me from answering for a moment. I could merely look at her.

And then, wondering at my own courage, but not caring what might happen to me because of it, I reached out and took her other hand in my free one—my free hand because I knew I had to keep my finger on the trigger of that gun or she might vanish.

I said, finally, "Love is—" And then I ran out of words again. But she must have been at least slightly telepathic, for her eyes grew very very round and wide, and her lips parted slightly and she said, "Oh!" Probably as Eve said it once, in Eden.

And it was I, not the gun, that exploded. The sight of her lips that way was just too much. Angel or not, I stood up and took her into my arms and kissed her as probably no angel had ever been kissed before. She said, "Oh," again, but naturally in a smothered sort of way, and then her arms went around my shoulders and began to tighten, and—

And, well that was all. She was gone. Utterly, completely gone, and there I stood with my arms around nothing.

Nothing whatever.

Not anything.

I sank slowly back down on the bed, in a dazed sort of way, just beginning to realize what I'd done. She was lost to me now, forever. I'd never see her again.

Experimentally, I swore mildly. Nothing happened.

I picked up the gun once more, but I knew there was no use trying to repeat that experiment. Not until, and if another guardian angel was assigned to me. Anyway, I didn't want "a" guardian angel. I wanted one particular one, and her only.

Still in a daze, I called up Gorski.

He said, "Hello," and I said, "This is Bill."

"My friend, what is it you want?"

I said, "Nothing," and hung up. It didn't even occur to me to wonder why I'd called him.

Just to have something to do, I picked up the automatic to put it away. I reached for it blindly and one of my fingers must have gone through the trigger guard, for there was a noise that sounded like the clap of doom. I'd not only pulled the trigger, but I'd fired the gun with the swabbing rod in the barrel, and it had exploded.

AND then a matronly nurse with buck teeth was bending over me, adjusting a bandage on my forehead. I closed my eyes again and then opened them and tried to sit up. She pushed me back and I stayed pushed; it didn't matter.

She said, "You're not seriously hurt,

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Mr. Benton, but you are to stay here another twenty-four hours before you leave."

"Another?" I asked, without any particular interest. "How many twenty-four hours have I been here?"

"Just one. A very mild concussion from a piece of flying steel that just grazed your head. You must have a guardian—"

It was too much. I let out a howl and sat up, and she stepped back, looking at me fearfully. "Are you all right?" she asked, and obviously thought I wasn't. "I'd better call—"

"No, no," I said, and tried to make my voice calm and soothing. There was no use ending up in the psychopathic ward now. Not that it mattered much if I did, but I wanted just to lie here and think this out and not have a lot of doctors asking fool questions.

"You had a sudden pain?" she wanted to know.

"Yes. That was it. Now leave me; I'll be all right." I tried to keep out of my voice the blank despair, the emptiness, that echoed through my mind. Somehow, I knew, I'd have to pretend that this had just never happened, gather up the paltry threads of life and try to keep on going.

She looked at me uncertainly, but she left. I think I cried a little. Yes, I'm sure I did.

They told me Gorski had phoned, and twelve hours or so later he came in a cab to take me home. He didn't say anything until the meter started clicking.

"My friend, someone there is I want you to meet," he told me.

"Nuts."

"Do not take it so," he said earnestly. "Of what good is an angel? You need a woman, a real woman, of flesh and blood. One I know you must meet."

"To hell with it."

"Ah, but unusual she is. An exquisite type of blonde beauty one but meets rarely. In the park, in Washington Square, I found her only yesterday. What you call amnesia she had. For hours about she had wandered, where to go not knowing. Since in fact four-thirty Tuesday morning."

"Four-thirty Tuesday morn— Why, that's when—"

Gorski nodded. "To Lila I took her. In her apartment she is staying; else I could only have turned her over to the authorities. Of course they might have found out from where she came, but then they might not. And—"

"Gorski! It's impossible; crazy; it's unbelievable. It just can't be—why aren't we going to Lila's?"

"That is the address I gave the driver. We are, in fact, here."

I WAS out of the cab even before it had stopped rolling, and running up the stairs. I was in the apartment probably before Gorski had paid the driver.

She was sitting on Lila's divan.

"Angel!" I choked.

"Bill!" So she *did* remember. I was on my knees on the floor before the divan with my arms around her and my head against her breast.

"It's—it's *not* impossible? You really are with me now? You—you won't leave again—ever?"

"Ever?" She laughed and it was a tinkling sound of music. "Not *ever*, because I'm mortal now. . . But even after we leave here we'll be together. . . You see, when you kissed me they decided that I couldn't—"

I motioned her into silence. Gorski had just come in. I got up, facing him. A haunting question rose in my mind.

"Gorski," I said seriously. "How did *you* happen to know all the answers? Why did *you* believe my story right

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from the start? And why was it you out of the entire populace of the city that found her?"

A smile scudded across his features. "My friend, do you really *want* to know?"

Maybe it was the way he said it. Maybe it was because I was afraid Angel would leave me somehow, again. But I shook my head. "No! No, Gorski, I don't want to know. . ."

He nodded, and turned to Angel. "It is perhaps best this way. Someday he will learn the truth. If I have not made a mistake, you will be with him when he learns. It is too bad we can choose only so few. . ."

I looked at Gorski. Something caught in my throat. There seemed to be a dancing halo of radiance hovering behind him—no—it wasn't behind him, it was all around him, like—

I turned to Angel. She was on one knee with her hands crossed over her breast, her head bowed. I was suddenly afraid. For no reason, but I was afraid. I ran to her and pulled her to her feet and into my arms.

Then I looked back at Gorski. But he was gone. . .

A LIFE FOR A DEATH ON EASTER ISLAND

By JUNE LURIE

FEMALE infanticide was widely practised on Easter Island, especially in the days when it was so thickly populated and the ever-present menace of starvation was increasing. Childbirth was always followed by a conference of the relatives to decide whether it should be kept or not. Quite often old people who had become a burden to the community, were taken out and stoned to death. There was a limit set on the population of Rapa Nui at nine hundred, and to keep this number there was a death for every birth. If a newborn child was permitted to live, an old person was led out and killed, and if an infant was smothered, some old person was given a new lease on life.

In Tahiti and elsewhere in the South Seas a strict tabu was placed around women in childbirth. But this was not so on Easter Island. The mother went through a semi-religious ceremony and her confinement was a public affair. As an added attraction, the father went through all the outward appearances of the confinement with the mother. They thought that such a display of thoughtfulness on the part of the father would insure an easy delivery and permanent health for the infant.

EVOLUTION OF A WORD

By KAY BENNETT

WHERE did we get the word "Atlantic"? The dictionary says that the ocean is named after the mountains of Atlas; but where did the Atlas mountains get their name? The words "Atlas" and "Atlantic" have no meaning in any language known to Europe. They are not Greek, and cannot be referred to any known language of the Old World.

In the Nahuatl language we find the radical "a, atl," which signifies water, war, and the top of the head. From this comes a series of words such as "atlan," meaning on the border of or amid the water, from which comes the adjective "Atlantic." A city named Atlan existed when the continent was discovered by Columbus, at the entrance of the Gulf of Uraba, in Darien.

Plato says that Atlantis and the Atlantic Ocean were named after Atlas, the eldest son of Poseidon, the founder of the kingdom. On the part of the African continent nearest the site of Atlantis there is a chain of mountains, known as the Atlas Mountains. In the time of Herodotus there dwelt near this mountain chain a people called the "Atlantes."

The civilization of the Old World radiates from the shores of the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean was the center of culture with Atlantis at its mouth. Every civilization on its shores possesses traditions that point to Atlantis.

Modern civilization is Atlantean. Without thousands of years of development which were had in Atlantis modern civilization could not have existed. The inventive faculty of the present age is taking up the great delegated work of creation where Atlantis left it thousands of years ago.

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PHOTO FINISH

by H. B. HICKEY

The car put on a burst of speed, but it seemed that the shoes ran even faster . . .

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"SEVEN, the devil; he's gone and a new gunner."

"Grab your dough, boys."

"Whose dice?"

"Give 'em to Tom."

"Who'll fade ten—five left, who'll fade the five?"

"You're faded, shoot!"

The photoroom of the Times Express was full of the sounds of the late afternoon crap game. The last edition was on the presses and relaxation was in order.

"Come on, boys, cover that ten! Tommy needs a new camera!"

The speaker and current holder of the galloping dominoes was a lanky but square-shouldered individual attired in unpressed tweeds. The others grinned at him.

"Yah! Yah! That's how Tommy gets all his cameras!"

"Some day we'll quit shootin' dice and Tommy'll have to work for his dough!"

The joshing was good-humored for Tom was the best-liked man on the staff.

Finally, the money was "covered" and the lanky fellow sank to one knee. His hand rose in the air.

"Come on, dice! I need that camera!"

"And I need *you!*"

Four startled faces were upturned. It was Pete Logan, editor.

"Come on, Tom, gotta see you in my office. Now!" He emphasized the last word.

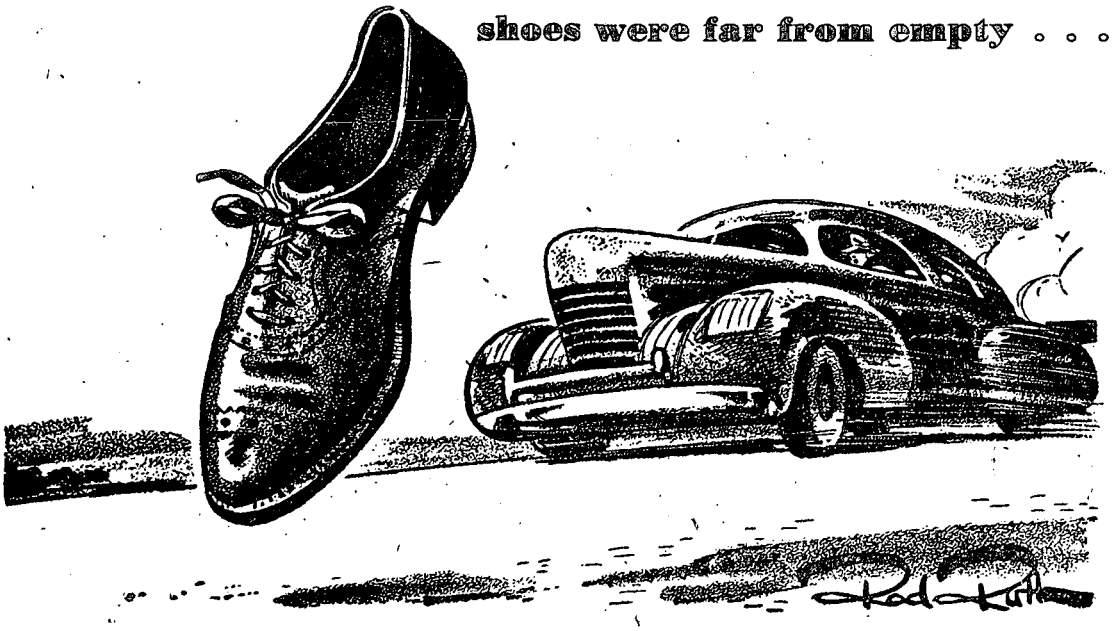
Tom Brennan stuffed the ten dollar bill into his pocket, then unkinked himself and got to his feet.

"See you later, boys."

He followed Logan from the room.

"What's up, Pete?" he inquired as he followed Logan into the latter's office. It was unusual for the editor to break up an afternoon session this way.

Chasing a pair of empty shoes seemed like a silly thing to do—only these shoes were far from empty . . .



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"You'll find out soon enough. Read this."

Brennan seated himself on Logan's desk and studied the galley-proof the other had thrust into his hands.

"Erwin Ritter, German spy condemned to die tomorrow at dawn before a firing squad, assured listeners today that his death would not stay the blow scheduled to fall on the United States later this week. With his deep-set, hypnotic, green eyes flashing he asserted: 'In two days, in one of your largest cities, a meeting will be held at which final plans will be made for the complete demoralization of your country. I may not be there in body but my spirit shall guide the planners.' "

TOM stopped reading and grinned down at his editor from his perch on the desk.

"So what? That loon has been making cracks like that ever since they caught him last May."

"Wipe that silly smile off your face, you big mick," Logan snapped, "You may think he's a nut, but he was one of Hitler's leading scientists, one who escaped a war criminal trial, and they'd never have sent him here if there weren't something big up. That talk of his about his spirit may sound crazy but don't forget he almost walked out of that jail last week. Every guard in the place fell asleep at once and only the electric lock kept him in. They weren't drugged and how he did it nobody knows yet."

He looked at Brennan's surprised face.

"Oh, you didn't know that, did you? Well, they didn't want to advertise it, so keep it under your hat."

"O.K., O.K., so now what, I'm just a specialty photographer. Why're you telling me all this?"

"Because, now get this—because, despite all our descriptions of him, despite the fact that the Secret Service men have cooperated one hundred per cent with the papers, no paper has managed to give its readers a picture of that little mystic, malevolent so and so nazi! Every shot shows nothing but a blur! I want a picture! Get it! You'd better;—either you do, or I'll go nuts. Our boys have snapped dozens of shots and what have we got. A blur! Maybe that under-sized balloon-headed maniac has got something we don't know about.

"You're going down there tomorrow morning to get a picture. I'll exert all the influence this paper's got to see you get it. Maybe with one of those trick lenses or plates you're always monkeying with you can do better than our newsmen have."

Brennan whistled. "Wow."

He'd never seen Pete so excited before. Tom's face had lost that derisive look and now was very thoughtful. A beautiful challenge to his rep as the best photographer in the business.

"I'll be there all right! Don't worry, boss."

He strode out with the same intent look on his features. As he dodged his way through the busy newsroom he was deaf to the greetings of his many friends, for his mind was already busy on the tools of his trade. By the time he reached his studio apartment where he lived alone, the choice of equipment had been made.

A TERRIBLY bleak, cheerless predawn found him desperately arguing with a guard outside the jail yard wall.

"Look, pal," the guard snarled, "I don't care if you're William Randolph Hearst himself, nobody gets in! See? Those are my orders. Now get moving before I slug you!"

An Army officer suddenly appeared

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at Brennan's elbow.

"You're Tom Brennan?"

"That's right. What about it?" Tom snapped.

The officer looked at him quizzically for a moment.

"Nothing," he said, "Just come with me, please."

He led Tom around the corner to a door guarded by several very tough-looking soldiers, who jumped to instant attention at sight of them.

"Let's have some light here," the officer snapped.

One of the men produced a flashlight by the aid of which Brennan and his credentials were thoroughly examined.

"You're Brennan, all right. Follow me."

The light had revealed the presence of the eagle on the shoulders of the uniform and Tom felt weak inside.

"I would get tough with a colonel!" he thought.

The colonel led him into a small office and invited Tom to sit down. After a moment's silence the officer began to speak.

"There has been great pressure exerted to enable you to witness and photograph the execution this morning. While it is our policy to withhold nothing of interest to the public, we are nevertheless unable to grant this request. No civilian may witness this event or photograph Erwin Ritter—even after death."

He held up his hand as Brennan began a protest.

"Sorry, my boy, those are orders. Now, how about a cup of coffee while we wait here? The execution takes place in half an hour, and we have decided to let you talk to some of the guards later if you wish to."

The coffee warmed him, and his lanky frame began to relax while his blue eyes regained their normal sparkle and his close-cropped black hair again was unruffled.

For a while they talked amiably. Then, "What do you know about Ritter, sir? What kind of a man was he? Do you think there's anything to this talk of his about the plot to destroy our country?"

"Whoa," smiled the colonel. "One at a time! I know very little more than you do about him. But one thing," he was now grim, "I'm afraid he meant business. The nazis seem to think they can spot us the atom bomb and still lick us. Ritter's no ordinary man."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Well, it's hard to explain an emotion or feeling but I tell you, that man frightened me."

Tom's gaze swept over the bemedalled chest to the officer's face. It would take plenty to scare this man.

The colonel continued. "It was the same feeling I'd had once before when I was in the Indies and watched a voodoo ceremony. He just—"

The sharp crack of rifle fire interrupted his recital. The two men sat for a moment in thought, and then Tom spoke up.

"I suppose it'll be a while before they're ready for me."

"No, they work fast. We can go now."

Brennan followed him down a corridor and into another room. The colonel put out his hand.

"Goodbye, Brennan, sorry we couldn't do more for you. One of his guards will be here in just a moment to tell you what he can."

He turned and walked out.

TOM had waited but a few minutes when the door opened and his opponent of that dawn's dispute entered. "Oh, it's you again, eh?" He was surprised. "You must have some pull all

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right, the way they take care of you."

"O.K., O.K., skip it. I'm just a guy doing his job, same as you. How about helping me out a little so you can get back to work?"

"Sure," the guard grinned. "Be glad to tell you anything I can, but I'm afraid it won't be much."

"First," Brennan wanted to know, "If you were one of his guards how come you were outside this morning?"

"Well," the guard hesitated, embarrassed.

The photographer was quick to understand.

"That business last week, huh? Just what did happen?"

"I'll be damned if I know!"

Recalling the experience brought bewilderment to his face.

"All I remember is that I was awfully sleepy all of a sudden. The next thing I knew everybody was yelling at me, and there they were marching the 'spook' back to the cell where I'd left him ten minutes before. It's a good thing the other boys passed out, too, or it'd been too bad for me. They tested us for all kinds of drugs, but no soap. Couldn't find a thing. After that they put him in solitary so I was switched outside. Anything else?"

"Yeah," Tom wanted to know. "Why did you just call him the 'spook'?"

The guard's face had assumed the same expression Tom had seen on the colonel's features, the fear of the unknown.

"We all called him that," he explained. "He was just a little guy, you know, all head and eyes."

He shivered.

"I'm glad they put me outside. I'd have got the shakes if I had to face those eyes much longer—"

He stopped dead.

Brennan tried to prompt him with more questions but the man had lost all taste for discussing Ritter. Tom reached in his pocket for a smoke and felt his fingers on something crinkly. He quickly palmed the bill. His eyes became thoughtful.

"Look," he began in a confidential tone, "Here's what's got us stumped. If you remember there were scads of photographers around snapping pictures of the 'spook', as you called him. None came out. I was sent down here this morning to see what I could do. You know what happened."

"Yeah," grunted the guard.

"Well, here's what you could do for me—"

"Whoa," he was interrupted, "Count me out on any fancy stuff, see? You'd better forget it, too. If they say no pictures it's no pictures. Unless you'd like to spend a few years in a federal pen."

"No, no, you've got me wrong," Tom protested. "Here's what I'd like you to do. I'd like to get hold of something Ritter wore. His hat or his shoes, for instance. Something I could build a little picture around. I'm sure they wouldn't mind that."

His voice dropped and he opened his palm so the other caught a glimpse of the ten-dollar bill inside.

"You could use a sawbuck and I'll have something to show for getting up so early."

The guard thought a moment.

"Sure, why not? They'll burn his clothes, anyway. Tell you what. I'll be through at eight. I'm on nights, you know. Meet me in forty-five minutes outside the front entrance."

Brennan nodded. The bill changed hands and was quickly pocketed by the guard. He showed Tom the way to the main gate and left him.

ONCE outside Brennan found a lunch-counter down the block

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where he ordered coffee and asked to use the phone.

"Who is it?" snarled the voice at the other end after Tom had got his number.

"It's Brennan, Pete, I couldn't get a thing."

"Yeah, I know. I talked to the Colonel just a few minutes ago. Well, forget it, go home and get some sleep."

He started to hang up. Brennan interrupted.

"I may be able to get some of his clothes, though. I'll see if I can work out some trick shots around them. I'll send the plates over in time for the last afternoon edition. How's that?"

"All right. Fine. Do whatever you can. See you later."

Half an hour later found Tom waiting impatiently for the guard who soon appeared, carrying a small package.

"All I could get was his shoes," he said as he came up to Tom.

"Swell!" Tom told him. "It's more than I expected."

"Oh, they didn't mind my taking them. They thought I wanted a souvenir." He grinned. "Small chance! I want to forget that guy as soon as possible."

"Thanks," Brennan smiled, "Maybe I can do you a favor sometime."

"That's all right, pal," the other replied, "That sawbuck is favor enough. I can really use it."

"I'd better be getting back to work. Be seeing you," Tom said.

Brennan parked his car outside the building where he lived. As he opened the door he almost bumped into his landlady.

"Why, it's Mr. Brennan!" She was surprised. "Up so early? Or are you just getting home?"

She smiled up at him for she was an understanding soul who saw no harm in others' enjoyment of life.

"Right the first time, Mrs. Morton," he laughed, "I was up with the birds this morning."

"A bit of early rising will do you no harm," she rejoined as she pattered down the stairs, her shopping bag under her arm.

Once inside his apartment, Tom opened the parcel to examine the shoes.

"Whew!" he whistled, "that Ritter certainly was a small fellow!"

The shoes could not have been more than a size five. They were made of fine leather, he noticed. Obviously their wearer had been a man of importance in the Reich to rate such quality when everyone else wore ersatz.

There was something strange about them, it seemed to him, and it was a few minutes before he sensed what it was. They were still warm! He shuddered.

"Better get to work, he thought, "before I start getting notions."

Still as he began to set up his camera he felt uneasy. The shoes had brought into the room an aura of evil.

For a few minutes as he busied himself with preparations there were no other thoughts in his mind than those of the business at hand. He set the shoes upon a white cloth on the floor, then focused a camera almost upside down above them. He drew the blinds and turned two spotlights on the shoes. They seemed to sparkle up at him from the floor.

As Brennan stared at them the reflection of the lights seemed to focus in one spot. He could not tear his gaze away. A feeling of lethargy crept over him as he stared.

"Should have got to bed earlier," he thought. "Not used to getting up . . . so . . . early . . . I haven't felt this sleepy in ages . . . Maybe—"

A sudden explosion outside his window brought him back to his senses. A

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car had backfired in the alley beneath his studio. Brennan turned off the lights. He still felt weary and drained of strength.

"I'd better take a nap," he spoke aloud, as he closed the studio door behind him and walked into the adjoining bedroom. "Maybe I'll dream up a few more ideas. Must be getting old if a little lost sleep knocks me out this way."

He lay down fully clothed and in an instant was fast asleep. . .

TOM BRENNAN was in a small gray cell. Against one wall was a plain cot and some six feet above it a window, heavily barred. Strangely he felt no surprise at finding himself there. Somewhere outside his window he heard sounds. Someone barked orders and the sounds became the tramp, tramp of marching feet. Tom walked to the cot, climbed up and stood looking through the bars. His gaze fell on a small yard below, enclosed by a tall concrete wall. Against the far wall stood the man who was giving the orders. He was small, very small, and he had the largest head Tom had ever seen. Before him paraded a small squad of khaki-clad soldiers, each carrying a rifle. At his shouted commands they wheeled left, then right, and then proceeded through a series of intricate maneuvers. Tom found himself admiring their precision greatly.

Suddenly at the command of the little man they formed a double row before him, those in front kneeling while the second row stood at attention behind them.

"Ready!" cried the little fellow.

They removed the rifles from their shoulders.

"Aim!"

The rifles were pointed at him. His head began to grow larger and larger and his eyes became visible — green blazing orbs which burned into Tom. The mouth became a great red slash. It opened.

"Boo!" it roared.

At this ridiculous command the men dropped their rifles and began to run in wild confusion. Their feet clattered over the cobbled yard as they dashed madly about. The clattering grew louder . . . louder . . . louder . . .

"Ugh!" Tom groaned. "Stop that infernal noise!" and found himself again on his bed in the apartment. What a dream! Or was it a dream? He still heard the patter of feet running madly about! It took him several seconds to realize that the sounds emanated from his own studio! He listened carefully.

"This is no dream!" he thought. "Someone's in there!"

He scrambled from the bed and in one jump had gained the door. He flung it open and snapped the switch beside it.

The room was exactly as he had left it! The shades were still down and in the center of the studio the little shoes twinkled innocently up at him from he center of the white cloth. Brennan groaned.

"I must be going daffy! Could have sworn there was someone in here!"

Still, the room held no hiding places. Besides the cameras, tripods, a long bench with an enlarger, and rows of shelves littered with other equipment there was not a closet or piece of furniture behind which to hide.

"Oh, nuts!" he grunted.

He looked at his watch. Two-thirty!

"Better snap into it and get those shots over to Pete or he'll skin me," he thought.

He busied himself and in half an hour had several satisfactory shots. He was about to wrap them up when a thought

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struck him. A few months before he'd done a job on a spiritualist and with the aid of some infra-red plates had succeeded in exposing the fraud.

"What can I lose?" he thought. "If it doesn't work out, Pete'll still have the others."

It took but a few minutes to get the plates from their container, change cameras, and focus the new camera and lamp on the shoes. He turned off the lights and the room was in stygian darkness. The same eerie feeling he'd had earlier crept over him but this time there was an undertone of terror.

"Damn this job!" he cursed, and hurriedly pushed the plunger. Quickly he snapped on the lights. He felt better. Now to get those plates wrapped up and over to the paper, and then to get rid of those accursed shoes which seemed to have been the source of the day's difficulties.

WHEN the wrapping was finished he closed the studio door and walked across the room to the hall door. Opening it he yelled down the stair well.

"Mrs. Morton! Mrs. Morton!"

She appeared at the bottom of the stairs.

"What is it, Mr. Brennan?"

"Johnny home from school yet? I'd like him to take some stuff over to the paper."

A small boy suddenly appeared behind the woman. "Sure, Mr. Brennan. You betcha. Want me to go now?"

"Uh-huh," Tom grinned.

Johnny was a likeable kid who plainly idolized the lanky photographer, who in turn was always ready to teach him camera tricks and whose pictures adorned the walls of Johnny's room. He bounded up the stairs.

"All set, Mr. Brennan," he panted.

"O. K., here's the stuff. Be careful now and don't drop it. Give it to Pete Logan. He'll know what it is."

"Sure thing, Mr. Brennan. I know Mr. Logan all right."

Tom fished out a quarter.

"Take yourself to a movie."

"Gee, thanks!" the boy breathed. Whole quarters were rare to him.

Tom watched him clatter down the stairs, snatch his cap from the hall tree and scoot out the door. Before Brennan could re-ener his room Mrs. Morton was in the hall again.

"What was all that running around before?" she questioned loudly.

"What running around?" he began and then thought better of it.

Perhaps she'd been dreaming, too. "Oh, nothing, Mrs. Morton, nothing."

He retreated to his room and closed the door. Now to clean up and get rid of the shoes.

As he returned the cameras to their accustomed places Tom could not help glancing again and again at the cause of his discomfiture. They looked innocent, but he was Irish enough to have some little respect for the supernatural. He stooped to pick them up. And as quickly dropped them!

They were as warm as they'd been when he first set them there! He beat a hasty retreat and slammed the door behind him. Brennan was trembling.

"Faugh!" he reassured himself, "I know what I need. A little drink will steady me and get those crazy notions out of my head."

His body reacted eagerly to his thought and in a moment, he'd pulled a bottle from a cabinet and poured himself a generous shot.

"Ah!" He felt better at once. "One more won't hurt."

The second was followed by a third quick one. A warm glow spread through him and he could feel himself relax.

"Why, sure," he reflected, "those

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late hours and the irregular life I lead are bound to upset my nerves. Feel better already."

He yawned. Certainly. A bit of sleep and a good dinner later would fix him up fine. Sleep was a soft fleecy cloud into which he sank gratefully. . . .

. . . Back to the same gray cell, back to the barred window, back to the cobbled yard with its fantastic scene. Only now the khaki-clad squad chased the tiny figure round and round an ever-narrowing circle. Round and round and round till they were but a revolving blur about a hub. And the hub was a head. Larger and larger it grew; those same green eyes flashing sparks, the mouth becoming a roaring red cavern. Larger, larger, it seemed about to engulf Brennan, when it began to grow smaller again and ever smaller, and again the blur about the hub and suddenly—the blur exploded. Men flew about the yard like ten pins and the little man laughed and laughed—a little tinkly laugh running up and down the scale. Running up and down, Tom thought. Running, running, running. . . .

"Stop that damned noise! Stop it!" Brennan roared and the sound of his own voice brought him back to his senses. Or was he awake?

"Damn those shoes! Damn those drinks! I'm going batty!"

Ever increasing consciousness had not deadened the pattering sound. Tom grew cunning.

"They're in the hall. This time I'll get them!"

HE CREPT noiselessly to the door —threw it wide. Nothing! He groaned. Suddenly the sound was behind him! He whirled! In the studio! Leaving the door open behind him he tiptoed to the studio.

Just beyond the door. Now he had hem! Tom steeled himself . . . silently twisted the knob . . . Now! The door swung wide—and something brushed past his feet. He fell back and his head hit the wall behind him. His eyes flew wildly over the floor. He must have gone mad! Two tiny shoes with no feet in them flew over the floor and out the apartment door!

An insane rage gripped him.

"I'll get them! I'll get them!" he cursed and followed in hot pursuit.

By the time he had gained the door the shoes were on their way out of the building by the conveniently open outer door.

Down the stairs, two, three, four at a time! Brennan fairly exploded onto the sidewalk.

"Which way? Which way did they go?"

He seized a bewildered passerby.

"Quick! Quick now! Which way'd they go?"

Then he saw them. Far down the street he saw something twinkle. Too late. He'd never catch them now.

"Wait! The car! If they'd only keep to the same street for a while," he prayed.

Fortunately for Tom's sanity the engine sprang to life instantly. In a flash the car was rolling. Brennan had driven but a block when he spotted the shoes again. They were running in the street now, close to the curb where few would notice them. He grinned.

Sight of the shoes had a sobering effect on him. Brennan's first thought had been to run them down but as reason returned he realized that they must have some destination. He slowed the car down to the pace of the shoes and, keeping them always in sight, followed along.

After several blocks the shoes turned a corner and Tom's car spurted to keep them in sight.

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"Hope they don't have much further to go," Tom thought.

The afternoon was drawing to a close and in a little while it would be too dark to see the shoes clearly.

His hope was realized. At the end of the next block the shoes finally paused, turned in and quickly climbed the stairs of a fine home.

Tom stopped the car and watched. The shoes hesitated before the door, then slowly turned, and Tom thought they were about to go back down the steps. But no. Instead they began a slow march across the porch, which extended the entire width of the house.

"What now?" Tom wondered.

And then he saw the shoes' objective. One of the French windows was open slightly, and through this the little footgear slowly slipped.

Tom waited a moment, and then, carefully, silently, he climbed up the stairs and stealthily crossed the porch to the open window. Again he was in luck. There was no latch on the window, and a slight push widened the opening sufficiently for him to enter.

As he stepped into the dimly-lit room he tensed, for his ears had suddenly picked up the sound of voices. He soon realized that the murmuring came from somewhere above him. He relaxed slightly. In a few moments his eyes had become accustomed to the semi-gloom of his surroundings.

In a few steps he crossed the room to a long corridor, flanked on both sides by several doors. His first try yielded nothing. It was obviously a seldom-used storeroom, for the dust was thick on everything.

His second try was equally fruitless, and the third door was locked.

HIS fourth attempt was the lucky one. The door opened on a large room, on one side of which a log fire crackled merrily. The room was brightly lit, and in the center stood a long table around which were grouped six chairs. Its occupants could not have left long before since the air still carried the scent of cigar and tobacco smoke.

"Maybe I'm getting somewhere at last," he thought, as he started to enter.

Suddenly something pressed into his back.

"Please raise your hands," a guttural voice commanded. "No tricks now. Do not make it necessary for me to shoot you."

Tom was marched to a position at one side of the fireplace.

"Now turn around," he was ordered.

He found himself facing a large automatic in the hands of an equally imposing individual. The man was Tom's equal in height but seemed almost his double in breadth. He had close-cropped blond hair, and the cold blue eyes which he fixed on Tom were as unwavering as the little hole in the center of the gun.

Behind him were four other men. Two set on the table a large complicated machine. It was a maze of wires and tubes, although it obviously was not a radio or any other electrical device Brennan had ever seen. These two, attired in dinner coats of uncertain age, might easily have been waiters in some restaurant.

The other two Brennan pigeonholed quickly. The smaller, slim, straight, dark, wearing thick-lensed glasses, was the typical German refugee. Brennan had seen hundreds like him, all professional men of one sort or another. The other did not need the odors of his trade to catalog him. His huge paunch, his bristling mustache and the jovial countenance which belied the mustache, said louder than words, "Beirstube."

The man behind the gun spoke.

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"You would not mind telling us for what you are looking?"

Inspiration seized Brennan.

"I wuzh jush down t'the corner t'get a dring, he began drunkenly.

The big man stared at him. It was not hard to believe. Tom's disheveled hair, his open collar and tie askew, suggested that he might have been at the corner a little too long.

Tom leaned drunkenly forward and breathed.

"Stay where you are, drunken pig!" cautioned the big man.

One of the "waiters" spoke up.

"Well, Ludwig, what are we to do with him?"

"I think that is obvious," replied Ludwig. "He may be nothing more than a harmless drunk. On the other hand," he continued, "he may not be nearly so harmless or stupid as he looks. In either case we must take no chances."

Ludwig glanced meaningfully around at the others.

"Now is not the time, of course, but later before we leave—"

Tom Brennan gambled all on one desperate play. As Ludwig turned to look at the others, he leaped forward and snatched at the gun. But Ludwig, whirling with a rapidity astonishing in one of his bulk, knocked Tom off balance with a slap of a burly paw.

"So!" he purred, "the fish rose to the bait?"

He smiled—an unpleasant smile, for it was confined only to his mouth, his eyes remaining as cold and unwavering as ever.

"I think we shall give you no more chances to cause trouble, my friend. Some rope, if you please, Victor."

THE fat man with the mustache left the room, and in a moment returned carrying a coil of clothesline.

"You will please turn around," the large man commanded.

In an instant, Tom's hands were firmly bound.

"Now his feet," ordered Ludwig.

Tom was stretched on the floor, and the fat man did a good job of lashing his feet. He was then unceremoniously dragged and dumped into a corner.

"Now, if you will please excuse us," Ludwig bowed to Brennan, "we will continue our business."

Tom glared up at him. The German's studied politeness was an infuriating thing.

Ludwig slipped the gun into his coat pocket, and the five seated themselves around the table. For a moment they stared in silence at the contraption in the center of the table. The "refugee" broke the silence.

"Well," he said, "now that we have brought the Depressor down, I still do not see that we are any farther advanced than we were before."

The others nodded in agreement.

Victor was next to speak. Addressing the first speaker, he queried, "Have you been unable to do anything further, Kurt?"

Kurt's precise, pedantic voice held a note of desperation.

"Nothing," he said, "nothing."

"It is maddening," he continued. "The problem, you understand, is an apparently simple one. In Germany the Depressor worked perfectly. In the United States the interference due to the many powerful radio stations and high power lines limit the machine's radius to a very small section. It would seem that we had but to increase the power to overcome this difficulty. It is not so. To increase the power would blow out every tube in the machine. It is very delicate, as you all know. There is only one man who might be able to remedy the de-

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fect—the man who invented the machine."

Kurt shrugged.

"I'm afraid we can expect little help from him."

One of the "waiters" spoke up.

"I, Paul Gerber, say it is ridiculous. We plan so carefully to bring Ritter and his machine here from Germany. We risk our lives. And then when success seems assured, that little madman must become involved in an argument on a street corner and bring himself to the attention of the police—he, who was always boasting of the 'power of the mind'!"

Ludwig interrupted.

"What you say is true, Paul, but it leads us nowhere. The question is: what are we to do? I'm afraid it all depends on us, for despite Ritter's talk we can expect little help from him now."

Brennan noticed something which had escaped the eyes of the others. The shoes were in the room. They softly crossed the floor and slid around the vacant chair as if whoever was in them was seating himself. From nowhere came a high, thin voice.

"Gentlemen, you should have more faith in me!"

IF THERE was astonishment on the faces of the listeners there was terror also, and Tom felt shivers running up and down his spine. Only the massive Ludwig was unaffected, and it was he who broke the shocked silence that followed the ghostly speech.

"So, Ritter, you did come back? I must confess we had given up all hope."

Ritter's voice was heard again.

"Yes, and you may thank our friend in the corner there. Without his aid I'm afraid I could never have managed it. You see, I was able to project my astral body beyond death, but I found that I needed one of my earthly garments to cling to. They burned everything but my shoes—those our young friend managed to obtain, little suspecting that I came with them."

He chuckled.

"I gave you several good frights, did I not, Mr. Brennan?"

Without waiting for a reply he continued, "Let us get to work! My present existence is an uncertain one and may be terminated at any time."

His next words were addressed to Kurt.

"I am disappointed in you, Kurt. The problem is not so difficult as it may have seemed to you. It is not a matter of increasing the power at all but merely one of changing the frequency of the impulse-carrying waves to avoid the interference."

Kurt groaned.

"Why didn't I think of that! I could easily design a new tube which would take care of it in short order. By the end of the week we should be ready to strike."

Again the ghostly chuckle was heard.

"Do not feel so bad, Kurt. The problem was not really so easy to solve. Then, too, I had more leisure than you."

The voice switched back to Brennan.

"A very interesting machine, Mr. Brennan. There are four more like it upstairs. There is one for Washington; one for New York; one for Chicago; a fourth for Detroit. The fifth for Los Angeles. I think those are the most important population and production centers in the country. The machines operate on a principle I discovered some time ago in my experiments in animal and human psychology . . . at Buchenwald before the Americans came. All thought, as you may know, and all emotion," he continued, "are governed by an electro-chemical process. This

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machine sends out waves which disturb that process. These waves exert a tremendously depressing influence on people's minds. After several hours exposure to its effects one becomes demoralized, a bundle of raw nerves unable to think reasonably. It is not hard to imagine its effect on the populations of large cities with everyone affected simultaneously. Very interesting, is it not?"

The voice changed suddenly to German, and for the next several minutes was directed at Kurt. Although Brennan could not understand what was being said, Kurt's change of expression from one of gloom to smiling comprehension and his repeated "Ja's" and "Jawohl's" made it clear that the difficulty was being resolved.

Finally Kurt settled back in his chair, a satisfied smile on his face. He looked at the others.

"I suppose you could not understand the technical language used but I may say our difficulties are over. By tomorrow night we shall be on our respective ways to the production centers."

The five had brightened perceptively, and Ludwig now spoke to the second tuxedoed man.

"Some more wood on the fire, Hans, and then if you will, a decanter and some glasses that we may drink a toast to the success of our venture."

THE flames leaped higher at the addition of fresh fuel, and then Hans departed to return in a few minutes bearing a tray on which were five glasses and a bottle of brandy. Ludwig poured a glassful for each of the visible conspirators. He rose to his feet.

"To the confounding of the enemies of the Reich and to the glory of our martyred fuehrer!"

The glasses were emptied.

Brennan could not restrain himself. A ribald noise issued from his lips. Ludwig whirled in fury, his face white, and flung his glass at the man in the corner.

The glass caught Tom squarely on the forehead and shattered into bits which fell all around him. A thin trickle of blood ran down over one eye and across his cheek.

"You Yankee pigs will be taught to respect the master race. Have no doubt of that!" Ludwig growled.

He turned his back to Tom and resumed his seat.

As Tom recovered from the shock of the blow, he realized that Ludwig's anger had given him a valuable opportunity. While the five with their invisible compatriot busied themselves in guttural discussion, Tom twisted about until he could get his hands on a large sliver of glass. Slowly, painfully, he bent backward and inserted it between the cords which bound his feet. Then he began to saw at the rope about his hands. His fingers were soon covered with blood, for at every other stroke the glass cut into his hand. He kept his lower lip between his teeth. The slightest cry of pain would have attracted the attention of those at the table.

Tom looked up. At last he could feel a slackening as strand after strand parted.

"Now if only those Huns would keep jabbering a while longer," he prayed.

He need not have worried. They were too engrossed in their plotting to pay any attention to him. He noticed that they were still affected by the spectral voice, which every now and then rasped out of nowhere. At its every speech, the five stared wildly at the empty chair from which the voice came.

At last, Tom's hands were free.

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Within a few moments he had untied his feet. His first impulse was to run. But no, that would never do, for they were sure to get him before he could get outside. Then he remembered the gun. Ludwig's back was to him, and the man's huge bulk shielded Tom from the eyes of the others.

Slowly he rose to his knees, then carefully assumed a crouching position. His body was stiff, and his arms and legs tingled as the circulation was restored to them. He gathered his strength for the final effort.

Brennan shot from his crouch like a tiger after prey. His outstretched left hand smashed between Ludwig's shoulder blades, knocking him forward onto the table, while Brennan's right hand dove swiftly into the other's coat pocket. Before any of them could recover from their surprise, Brennan had the gun.

"So!" he shouted, "the master race isn't as smart as it thinks!"

The five were crestfallen. Even the imperturbable Ludwig had lost his unruffled look.

"Line up!" Brennan ordered. "Now back away from the table! Stick together! Don't fan out! Over there—next to the fireplace," he commanded.

Slowly they backed toward the corner, their eyes watching him furtively.

Suddenly the disembodied voice was heard again.

"Well, Mr. Brennan, I'm afraid we misjudged you. You are really quite a hero! But not for long. Already the gun wavers. You are growing tired again!"

IT WAS true. Tom could feel himself slipping. Slipping again into the torpor to which he had succumbed that afternoon. This time, though, the stakes were too great. Then, too, the element of surprise was no longer there.

Brennan forced himself to shout.

"No, you don't! Not this time, you don't!"

The sound of his own voice revived him slightly.

"Don't shout so, Mr. Brennan," Ritter's voice chided. "It really will do you no good to shout. I am bound to defeat you, you know. After all, I'm not like the others.

"You may threaten them with the gun, but there is very little you can threaten a ghost with!" he laughed. "One can't very well shoot a ghost, can one?" Then in a more serious vein, "But you really are tired, aren't you, Mr. Brennan? And it is very warm in here, isn't it? It doesn't pay to struggle so when you could relax. There now, you are relaxing!"

The five in the corner stood still, afraid to stir lest they disturb the battle of wills which Ritter was plainly winning. The blood still flowed into his left eye from the gash on Brennan's forehead, and he swayed, his knees almost ready to buckle beneath him. Somehow, though, he retained his grip on the gun. And the others, if not Ritter, respected that.

The voice had become a dull monotone, lulling Brennan to sleep. It droned on.

"After all, one can't shoot a ghost, can one? There is no way to harm a ghost is—there?"

The voice stopped abruptly. Ritter had asked a rhetorical question, but he had seen the answering gleam in Tom's eye.

There *was* a way!

From deep within Brennan, a rage welled up. It poured strength into his weary frame. He had the answer!

Ritter moved. Too late! Tom hurled himself headlong at the floor, and before the others, who rushed from the corner, could reach him, he scooped

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up the shoes and flung them straight into the fire!!

Then they were on him. The body of the giant Ludwig hurtled downward at him. Tom spun to avoid the bull-like rush and managed to stagger to his feet. He sensed, rather than saw, the others bearing down on him. As of its own volition, the gun in his hand roared. Blindly Tom pulled the trigger again and again and again.

The first shot caught the slender Kurt full in the chest and drove him backward coughing blood. The second crashed into the diabolical machine on the table. The others had no effect except to fill the room with smoke and thunderous echoing and re-echoing blasts. Above all was the smell of burning leather which was as incense to Brennan.

As the last bullet left the chamber, Ludwig's hand swept the gun from Tom's grasp. His clubbed fist smashed Brennan to the floor. The giant nazi had gone completely mad. Gone now was his suavity. Nothing remained but the brute engine of destruction. German curses poured from his mouth. He towered over Brennan, a colossus of wrath. Tom could not move as he stared up at the impending doom.

The German's huge foot was raised above Brennan's face. Tom closed his eyes. There was no fear in him. The destruction of the shoes and their evil occupant had brought a relief of tension which made everything else insignificant. He had been drained of all emotion, even fear. He steeled himself . . .

The sharp crack of a pistol resounded through the room and a heavy body toppled across Brennan. A sharp gasp of pain came from his lips. Slowly he opened his eyes. The room was filled with blue-coated men. Through a red haze he saw Pete Logan crouched above him. Brennan sighed and passed out. . . .

HE CAME to gasping for air. The burn of strong brandy was in his throat. His eyes blinked rapidly several times and finally stayed open. For a moment they focused on the face before him, then closed again. He had been right, the face was Logan's.

"Wh-what're you trying to do," Brennan gasped, "revive me or get me drunk?"

Logan heaved a sigh of relief. "Guess you're all right, all right," he said. "For a minute you had me plenty scared. When we got here you looked like a dead duck. What a gory mess you were!"

Tom was beginning to feel better and started to sit up. He found himself in the same room but it was now empty except for himself and Logan. There remained the smell of gunpowder and burned leather, if his throbbing head were not enough to assure him that he hadn't been dreaming again.

"What happened?" he queried weakly.

"Well," Logan replied, "we broke in just as that big guy was about to give you one of those nazi facials. One of the coppers nailed him before he could get his foot down. Then we just collected the rest, including that guy you plugged before we got here."

He slapped Brennan's shoulder, admiringly, "You sure did all right for yourself."

He grinned. "Haven't seen a joint so thoroughly shot up since prohibition days."

Tom looked puzzled. "Yeah," he wanted to know, "But how did you know where I was? And where'd the police come from?"

Logan was surprised. "I hollered copper when I couldn't find you, of course. That's one good thing about

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being editor of a big paper. You can always get police cooperation."

Brennan still looked puzzled, Pete patiently continued his explanation.

"Well, when I got to your apartment and found you gone with the door wide open, I knew something had happened. Then Mrs. Morton spotted me and told me how you'd roared out of there just before I came. By that time I was positive you were on the trail of this gang. Your car was gone, too, so I called the chief of police and got every man on the force busy looking for it, figuring that when we found the car we'd find you, too. It wasn't too long before the squad on this beat spotted the car. They called in and we beat it out here with two more squads. You know the rest."

He paused, then: "What a haul!" he crooned. "What a scoop! We get the whole gang! And then we get an exclusive story to boot! This'll get you a fat bonus!" he promised Tom.

The puzzled look was glued to Tom's face. Logan stared.

"What's wrong now?" he wanted to know. "Isn't that clear?"

"Yeah," Brennan retorted, "except for one thing: start at the beginning, will you? What made you think anything was wrong at all? What started you looking for me? Just explain that," he begged.

Slowly a look of comprehension spread over Logan's features.

"Didn't you see that last plate?" he asked. "The infra-red shot?"

One look at Tom's blank face showed Brennan didn't know what he was talking about.

"It was just an afterthought," Tom explained. "You don't mean something actually showed up?"

"Something sure did!" was Logan's retort. "And if I could think of a sensible explanation for the G-men I'd publish that picture! But what the heck, after tonight's scoop our readers won't miss it!"

"For crying out loud, Pete, will you please tell me what the picture showed?" Tom entreated. "Or do you want me to go nuts?"

Pete Logan dipped his hand into his pocket and slowly drew out a print. Without speaking he handed it to Brennan.

Tom's jaw dropped. It was a clear shot of a man with several bullet holes in him! A little man with a big head!

THE END

GRASS PILLS

By SANDY MILLER

THE desert land in Arizona has only about ten inches of rainfall a year, but if a recent experiment works this land will soon be a grazing land for cattle. Long before the Pilgrims came to Plymouth, the Papago Indians were living in the southwest. Their herds of cattle slowly ate away all the grass and then there were no grass roots to hold the topsoil. Then the winds blew the topsoil away and this land was no longer of any use.

Dr. L. S. Adams has invented a way of planting this desert land. He has made little balls or pellets of dirt and special grass seed. This seed grows into a sturdy stalk of grass called Lehman's Lovegrass. The pills are made by a machine which works right out on the land. The desert soil is first hammered to a powder and then sprayed with a chemical that kills all insects and keeps the seed from drying. The machine makes the soil into balls about the size of peas and puts a few seeds in each ball. Last, powdered fertilizer is added.

The grass pills are planted by being dropped from a plane. After these are dropped they can lie on the desert safely until the next rain when they will start to sprout. Some day we hope our deserts will be as green as grass.

* * *

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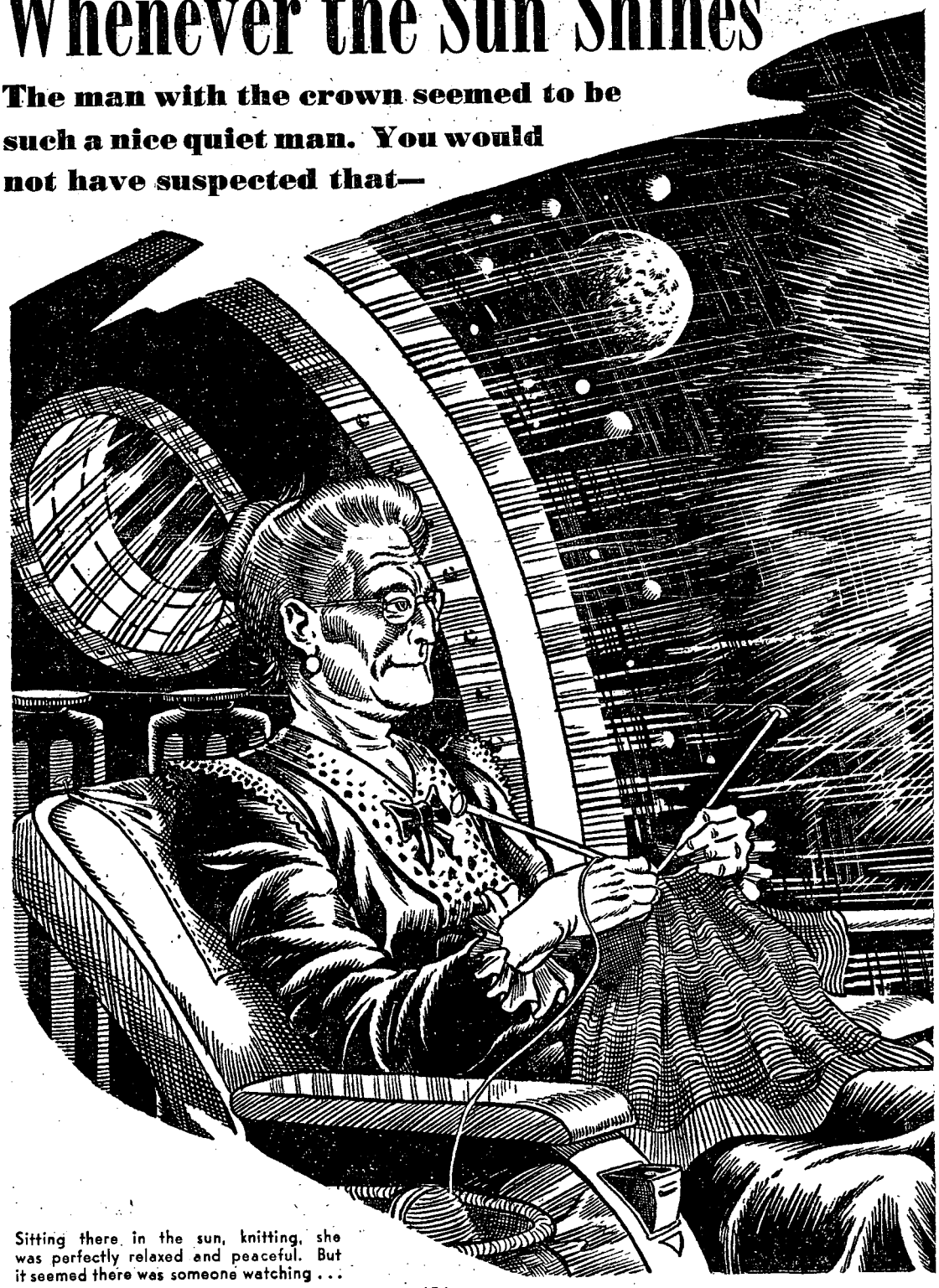
Whenever the Sun Shines

The man with the crown seemed to be such a nice quiet man. You would not have suspected that—



Sitting there in the sun, knitting, she was perfectly relaxed and peaceful. But it seemed there was someone watching . . .

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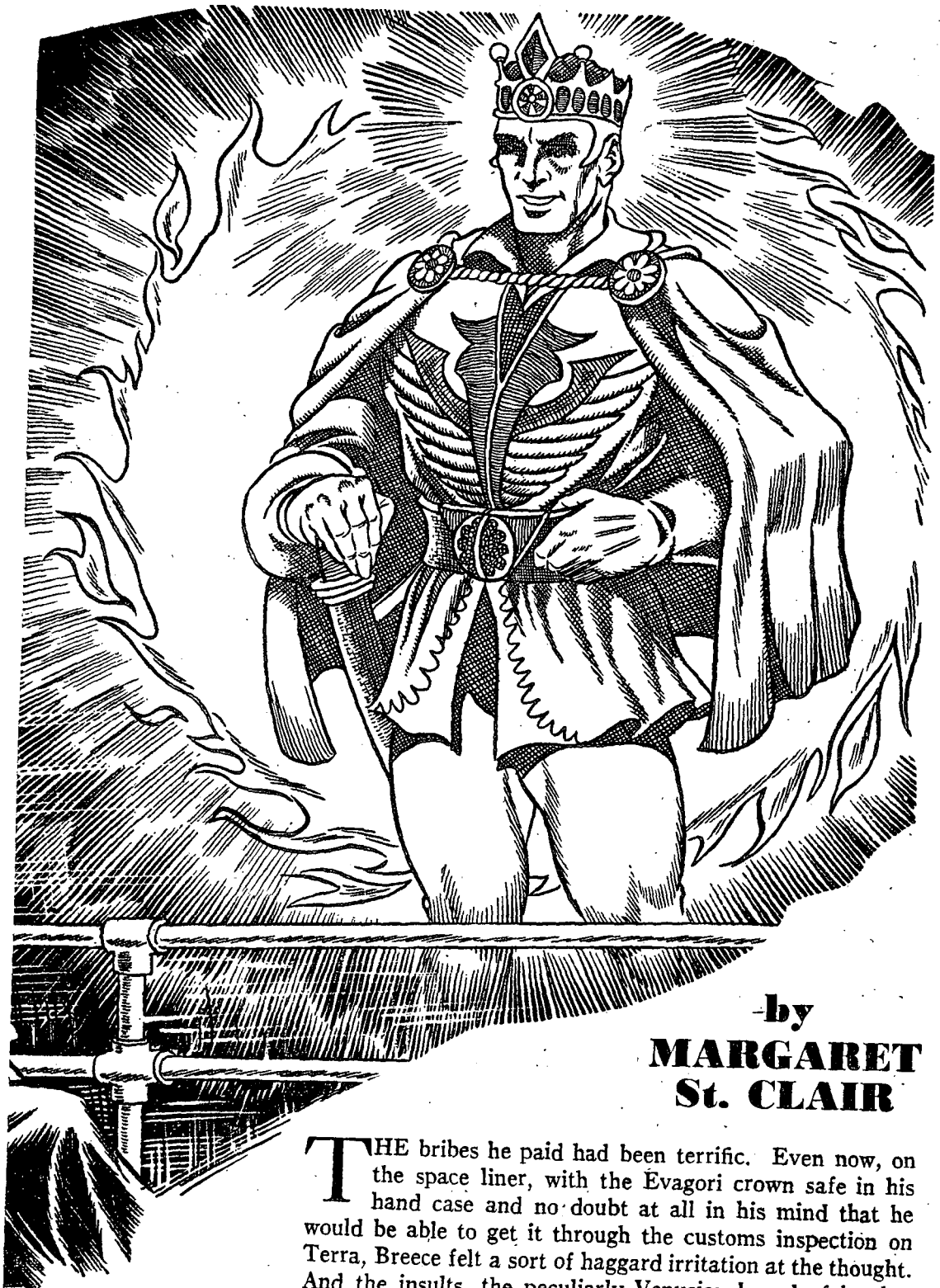

by
MARGARET St. CLAIR

THE bribes he paid had been terrific. Even now, on the space liner, with the Evagori crown safe in his hand case and no doubt at all in his mind that he would be able to get it through the customs inspection on Terra, Breece felt a sort of haggard irritation at the thought. And the insults, the peculiarly Venusian brand of insults,

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he had had to submit to—! Nothing terrestrial could impress a Venusian; their attitude was always that a Earthman was honored to be on the surface of Venus at all. It was as though in every Venusian mind was a constant perception of, a constant awareness of, the existence of Ieradon.

In a way it was justified. As soon as the first space ship from Terra had touched on Venus, Breece knew, Ieradon had become a place of pilgrimage for the men of earth. It had always been one for the Venusians. They spoke of going "up to Ieradon"—Ieradon was a mountain city, set among the first peaks of the lofty Damnaor range—with a peculiar lift and thrill in their lilting tones. The men from Earth—

Even a man as unperceptive as Breece felt the absurdity of calling them tourists. No one tried to capitalize on Ieradon, no money was made from it. It stood on the peak where it had been built four thousand years ago, and had the mountains for its handmaidens. *It was.* And the people came to it from Terra, driven by a passionate hunger, a consciousness of something which had always been unfulfilled; the people from Terra came to Ieradon and were satisfied.

The planes always circled twice above Ieradon before they landed. As they made their long circuit over the city, wheeling like eagles in the dark-blue sky, a sigh, a gasp—Breece had heard it when he went to Ieradon—would always sweep over the ship. Breece had been standing beside a dark-skinned couple (both middle-aged, their bodies thickened with the years, the woman's face a blank, enameled mask) on the first great circuit and had seen the incredulous joy begin to glow in them. The man had turned to his wife, almost babbling, with words that surely had not been in his mind since the days some teacher had read them aloud, droning over the book, in school.

" 'The world's great age begins anew, the golden years return—' Why! That's," he gestured toward the city through the ports, *"that's* what he meant!"

"Yes . . . yes . . ." the woman had answered him, her face transfigured, her eyes smiling as if she had seen an angel, while tears of joy poured down her cheeks.

Ieradon.

The woman sitting beside Breece on the observation deck, a Mrs. Hartley-Weems, coughed and cleared her throat. "The captain says we'll be docking on Terra in just under forty-four hours," she said.

"Does he? Well, that's fine."

"Yes, I think so. Of course Venus has its points, but I do feel there's no place like one's home planet." She leaned toward Breece. "By the way," she said in a lower tone, "have you noticed that *extraordinary* man?"

BREECE followed the direction of her gaze to the man who was standing with binoculars by the visiports. He seemed a little taller and slighter than most terrestrials, but Breece found it difficult to make out the details of his appearance because his eyes had begun to water and blur.

"Yes, he is an odd sort of chap," he answered. "Venusian, from his looks."

"I suppose so," Mrs. Hartley-Weems replied. "And yet, he doesn't seem quite like a Venusian. There's something about him I can't quite place, something odd." She was frowning. "He reminds me of—no, it's gone again . . .

"He doesn't have his meals in the dining salon, either. I described him

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to the purser, trying to find out who he was and what cabin he had—I think it's pure snobbishness not to know who your neighbors are on a small ship like this—and *he* said there was no such person on the passenger list. He was almost rude about it. The service one gets everywhere nowadays! Really, I don't know what's got into everyone." She sighed and settled back in her deck chair.

Breece made a commiserative noise and went on with his thoughts.

He had first heard of Liparinthi some six years ago, from a very drunk, very unhappy Venusian in a wretched little saloon on the outer edge of Aphrodition. The Venusian had been telling Breece a circumstantial narrative about his relations with a woman named Maera. Maera had rebuffed him painfully, repeatedly, and over a long period of time.

"Finally I said to her, 'Maera, you are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen. Do you want to be like Liparinthi, too high to be thought of, too sacred to be touched?' And she said—"

"Liparinthi?" Breece had interrupted the drunk.

"Yes, Liparinthi. *You* know; the place we never talk about. The place that is not on any map." He was extremely drunk; he must have thought Breece was a Venusian like himself.

They had been talking in low tones; how could the men at the other tables have heard them? But a Venusian sitting over by the wall pushed back his chair and came over to the two men with a swift, cat-like tread. He had tilted back the drunk's head with the fingers of one hand and stared into his face. "Keep with your own kind, brother," he had said. "You are drunk." And then, to Breece: "What has he been telling you? Earthman, what did he say?"

"He's so drunk I could hardly understand him. Something about a woman, some girl of his."

"Ah." The Venusian frowned at him. Suddenly a sliver-gun appeared in his hand, the tiny, deadly weapon the police of three planets had not been able to repress. He had hesitated, his finger touching the lever on the end. "He spoke of nothing else?"

"Why, no. Only about how cold she was and how much he wanted her."

". . . You must go, though."

Out of the corner of his eye Breece had seen that the other Venusians in the room had their guns on him. He had shrugged a little and left the saloon. That was his first clue, six years ago.

IT WAS interesting, in a way, to follow the links in the chain forward from that indiscretion in the saloon to the time, two months ago, when Breece had stood in the citadel, the heart of Liparinthi, the Evagori crown in his right hand.

The secret decree of the supreme council of Venus, for instance—that had been a vital link. He had bribed an archivist in the National Library to let him see it for fifteen minutes or so; it had cost him thirty thousand dollars. But it had been worth it, for the decree had narrowed his search from the entire surface of a planet to an area the size of Spain and France combined.

"How had it run?—"Certain portions of the planet Venus, as hereinafter described, are to be sacred, inviolate and arcane" (that was the nearest Breece could translate the Venusian word) "in perpetuum . . ." There had been an enacting section and a list of penalties, most of which Breece had not been able to translate, and the law had ended with a formula which Breece had not understood at all: "By the

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three globes and the sun." But whether he had understood the quasi-religious injunction at the end or not, one thing had been clear—that between certain degrees of latitude and longitude Liparinthi was to be found, though it was not referred to, even indirectly, in the law itself.

Mrs. Hartley-Weems leaned toward him again. "You know that man I was speaking about?"

"Yes?"

"Well, it's the strangest thing, but every time I see him, a word comes into my mind. . . I simply don't understand it. It's completely inappropriate."

Breece looked around the observation deck. The object of Mrs. Hartley-Weem's curiosity had vanished, probably to get cleaned up before lunch.

"What is the word?" he asked.

"Well, really, I—it's so ridiculous! *Radiant.*"

"Radiant?"

"Yes. . . I told you it was ridiculous." Mrs. Hartley-Weems nodded at him twice, got out a vibra-needle, and began working on the sleeve of the sweater she was making for her grandson.

There had been set-backs, difficulties, Breece thought, even in the places he had imagined would be reliable. Krotalis, in the department of the interior, for example. It was less than five months ago that Breece had handed eighty thousand dollars in bearer bonds across the table to him. Krotalis had looked them over carefully, checked the denominations, and slipped them into his pocket. He had stood up: "Good day, Mr. Breece."

Flabbergasted, Breece had protested, tried to cajole him into giving the information he had been paid for. Krotalis had listened for a moment in silence. Then he had leaned forward across the table to Breece, resting his weight on the palms of his hands.

"Mr. Breece. Do you know what would happen to you if I were to go into the next room where the clerks are working, and say, 'An Earthman in my office has been asking me about Liparinthi?' *Do you know?* You are luckier than you realize, Mr. Breece, that I merely take your money, and do not betray you as my duty is."

THE insolence, the bitterness, the scorn in his voice! Only a Venusian could have combined moral indignation with taking a bribe. Breece had nodded stiffly once, and left the office. It was some consolation to him now, when he remembered the insolence and the bribes, to know that he had the Evagori crown in his hand-case; a thing so sacred that to say it was the Holy of Holies in a Venusian's eyes was as inadequate as it would have been to express the crown's enormous intrinsic worth by saying it was valuable.

Yes, the Evagori crown. How much would Moreen give him for it? Three million, four million dollars? Nonsense. He would begin by asking much more than that. Moreen had encouraged him, it was true, when he first got on the trail of Liparinthi, he had helped him with money, but Breece was under no obligation to him. There were at least two other collectors on Terra who were fully as enthusiastic and fanatical as he.

The best of it was that there was no real danger anywhere. Rhymor, who had supplied most of the last stage information and had even piloted the plane in which Breece had gone to Liparinthi (he had been desperately in need of money, and Breece had tightened the screw on him without mercy), had taken his payment, nodded politely to Breece, and gone home and killed

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himself. Elpenor, who had been almost as useful to Breece a little earlier, had met with a fatal accident; Breece had paid rather heavily (bribery again—it was disgusting) to make sure the accident would be fatal. Krotalis was in prison with a ten-year sentence for defalcation, and the others Breece had had contacts with had no idea who he was. As to Liparinthi itself, it had been completely unguarded. Breece was the first man who had set foot in its streets for five thousand years. Things had worked out beautifully.

The gong in the dining salon rang. Mrs. Hartley-Weems sat up alertly. "Lunch" she said to Breece. "There's nothing like being in space to give one an appetite. Now, notice if I'm not right; that *extraordinary* man won't be in to this meal, either."

* * *

After lunch, with the door of his stateroom locked, Breece got out the Evagori crown. It was very well concealed in his hand case, and it took him nearly fifteen minutes of continuous manipulation to get it out. Finally he opened the chamois-lined case in which he had put it and laid it on his berth. He stepped back and looked at it.

It was beautiful, yes. The Evagori crown must be the most beautiful thing in the solar system. He needed a more beautiful word than beautiful to describe it; it was—it was more beautiful than Ieradon.

It had power. There was about it an almost tangible, an almost palpable aura of majesty. Looking at it, Breece could understand again something that seemed inconceivable otherwise; that, when he had first opened the temenos and seen the crown lying on the altar, as the Evagori had left it five thousand years ago, he had been within an inch of turning away again and leaving it laying there.

Only the thought of all the bribes he had given, of all the insolence he had endured, had restrained him. And when he had lifted the crown up and had opened his case to put it away, he had felt something he had not felt since the time he was eleven years old and his mother had died, a bitter, heart-grinding sense of loneliness and rejection. There was the same awful sense that something he had taken for granted all his life had gone, that hereafter he would be alone. Standing there by the altar, the crown in his hand, he had felt that he had divorced himself from humanity. He had felt he was no longer a member of the human race.

He had come out from the temenos feeling pale and sick and had said to Rhymor, standing by the plane, "Let's get out of here."

THERE was a rap at the cabin door. It must be the steward, come to ask him at what time he would like his bath. He began to put the crown away. Fortunately, replacing it in his hand case was a much quicker process than getting it out had been. He finished with the last fastening and thrust the case under his berth. He opened the door.

It was not until the man was inside that he saw it was not the steward, and then it was too late. The terrible, consuming glow had begun to shine on him; it was brighter than the sun. He tried to push it away and could not, he tried to scream and felt his tongue baking in his mouth. There was pain, horrible, long-lasting pain . . .

* * *

"And did you have a nice trip, mother?" Mrs. Hartley-Weems' daughter asked as she tucked the lap robe around her mother's knees.

"No, I did not," Mrs. Hartley-Weems

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replied with decision. "The most awful thing — give grandmother a nice kiss, Bobby — happened. Just before we landed they found one of the passengers —such a nice man, I'd talked to him quite a bit—in his cabin, burned to death.

"Goodness! Did he kill himself?"

"Oh, no. Nothing else in the cabin was touched at all. When I say burned, I mean—well, he was reduced to a *cinder,* that's all. He must have suffered a great deal. The first mate told me they were absolutely at a loss to imagine what had happened. That's why we were so late docking; they were examining our baggage and so on."

"You mean somebody killed him? How?"

"Dolla, they simply don't know—at least, that's what the first mate told me. Personally, I feel sure that extraordinary man the purser said wasn't on the passenger list had something to do with it. In fact, I told them so, but they all laughed at me. And then afterwards I saw him parading around with the most outlandish crown on his head. It was positively a weird thing—and you should have seen those Venusians cringe away before him! Guilty consciences if you ask me!"

"But what about that man, grandmother, where did he go?"

Mrs. Hartley-Weems sniffed disdainfully. "I don't know. I was sitting in my deck chair getting some sunshine the last time I saw him. He passed right in front of me—and that's strange now that I think of it—he didn't cut the sunlight off. No, yes—it actually seemed to grow brighter . . .

"Anyway, he was gone when I tried to find him."

BOY EMPERORS OF ROME

By PETE BOGG

WHEN the great Theodosius, having overcome all his enemies, died in 395 A.D., he left the vast Roman empire to his sons, Arcadius and Honorius. Arcadius, who was about twelve years of age, was Emperor of the East, and Honorius, who was eleven, was Emperor of the West. Neither of the boys inherited their father's manliness or mental capacity. Arcadius was short and ill-shaped. His only accomplishment was his fine handwriting. He was governed by his ministers and generals, and when they were destroyed, his wife became his ruler. He died in 408 A.D. To Arcadius had been assigned Constantinople and the eastern provinces. As Emperor of the West, Honorius became absolute master of Italy, Gaul, Spain, and Africa. Under the wise direction of Stilicho, whom Theodosius had appointed Commander-in-Chief in the West, these immense dominions were kept together. But the boy, Honorius, amused himself in Milan, where he held court. He had a gentle disposition, but was dull and grew up without any strength of character. When Alaric, king of the Visigoths, burst into Italy with his fierce warriors in 400 A. D., Honorius fled to the secure fortress of Ravenna, while Stilicho kept them at bay. After the death of Stilicho, who was killed by his enemies at court, the difficulties of the Empire increased. Fresh hordes of barbarians poured down from Germany into Italy, and in 408 A.D., Alaric besieged Rome, but was bought off by a heavy ransom. In the following year, however, he returned, captured the city and gave it up to be plundered by his soldiers. While the streets of his city were streaming with blood Honorius was calmly passing his time at Ravenna in his usual occupation of feeding his poultry. He was very fond of his fowls, and had named his favorite hen "Rome." One day a servant came to him and said, "Rome is destroyed." The Emperor exclaimed that she had just now eaten from his hand. The servant went on to explain that the city of Rome was destroyed by Alaric, but the Emperor was only concerned about his pet hen "Rome" that he thought for a moment was dead. Thus the feeble son of Theodosius the Great amused himself while the Roman Empire tottered to its fall. He lived to be thirty-nine years old, dying of dropsy in 423 A.D., after having reigned more than twenty-eight years. Had it not been for the ability and energy of his guardian, Stilicho, and afterwards of his general, Constantius, he would have lost both his dominions and his life long before that time.

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CAUL SUPERSTITIONS

By H. R. STANTON

THERE are on record some exceptional cases in which a child is born with a membrane around its head. This veil or hood was known as a "caul" and superstitions regarding it date back to ancient times. A child born in this manner was considered very fortunate. The caul was expected to bring good luck to whomever possessed it. The caul is simply a part of the membrane which covers every child before birth, but in some cases it is tough and doesn't break during delivery. The caul at one time was in great demand among attorneys, for they believed it would make them more eloquent. Its principal use was as a charm in preserving the owner against shipwreck, and was in great demand by seamen and travelers. In the past century the London Times has carried ads of cauls for sale, guaranteeing them by saying that the previous owner had been saved at sea. The prices ranged from ten pounds sterling up. Wealthy people had their cauls decorated with family jewels and bequeathed them in wills. A caul was sold in the shipping district of London at a public sale in 1915. It was believed that a caul hung in the captain's cabin prevents the ship from sinking.

* * *

AN ANNAMITE FUNERAL

By FRANCES YERXA

DRUMS were sounding—flat-noted, loosely bound tomtoms in timeless rhythm. Brazen cymbols of grating insistent harshness like the crack of doom filled the town with eerie echoes. All business in Saigon had ceased while a distinguished Annamite was carried on his last trip through the city streets to his final resting place, a place where the soothsayers had said would be most likely to preserve the peace of his soul.

This funeral stretched back for a couple miles. The head of the procession was made up of marchers in pairs, each pair carrying a small table which held up a mast and banner. The banner-carriers are in the procession for business reasons only, as they are not dressed for the funeral. Some wore only trunks. Some of the carriers were women and little children. Further back in line came two little boys carrying a four-legged sedan chair, its occupant a glazed pig. After the pig came numerous pipers, drummers, wailers, and gong-beaters. After several hundred of such paraders, there came an ornate cart that looked like an old circus wagon carrying a lot of devil chasing paraphernalia, and right behind that was the hearse. The hearse was made of a Ford chassis with a wide platform built out over it. On this platform beneath a canopy made of red and gold pieces of glass rested the coffin draped with a few red blankets. The chauffeur was seated on the platform with his back against the coffin. A large crayon drawing of the principal of the affair hung at the head of the platform. After the hearse, came the mourners, women dressed in white robes and high pointed hats. They were wailing loudly trying to make themselves heard above the din of gongs and pipes. More than a hundred men followed them, dressed in all manner of costumes. Finally came the rickshaws and empty carriages pulled by hairless ponies.

THE whole town had turned out to see the passing cortège. This was the nearest thing to a carnival since the death of the last Annamite.

In Saigon the Annamites keep busy feeding themselves. They would go hungry before they would eat alien cooking. Next to this business of sustaining life is the necessity of disposing of their dead. The Annamites follow the Chinese custom in this matter. They think that cremation practised by their Buddhist brethren of Cambodia would be quite a hindrance to the soul of the departed in its wanderings after death. That is why they have such grand, loud funerals with equipment to scare away the devils that are always lurking about on the edge of the spirit world ready to snatch an inexperienced wraith.

As a result of this funeral cult has come a trade necessary since the building of two and three story houses with narrow stairways and halls. This is the trade of coffin-handling similar to piano movers in our country. The Annamites were always considerate of the feelings of their dead and decided that it wasn't good to tip the body about while removing it from the house. To make sure that this does not happen, it has been the custom to place a glass of water at the head and foot of the coffin, and the idea is to get the coffin out and into the hearse without spilling the water. This proves to be quite difficult in some cases of narrow, sharp turns in stairways, but they go to a great deal of trouble to sooth the corpse and so far they have had no complaints.

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High Ears

by ROG PHILLIPS

CHAPTER I

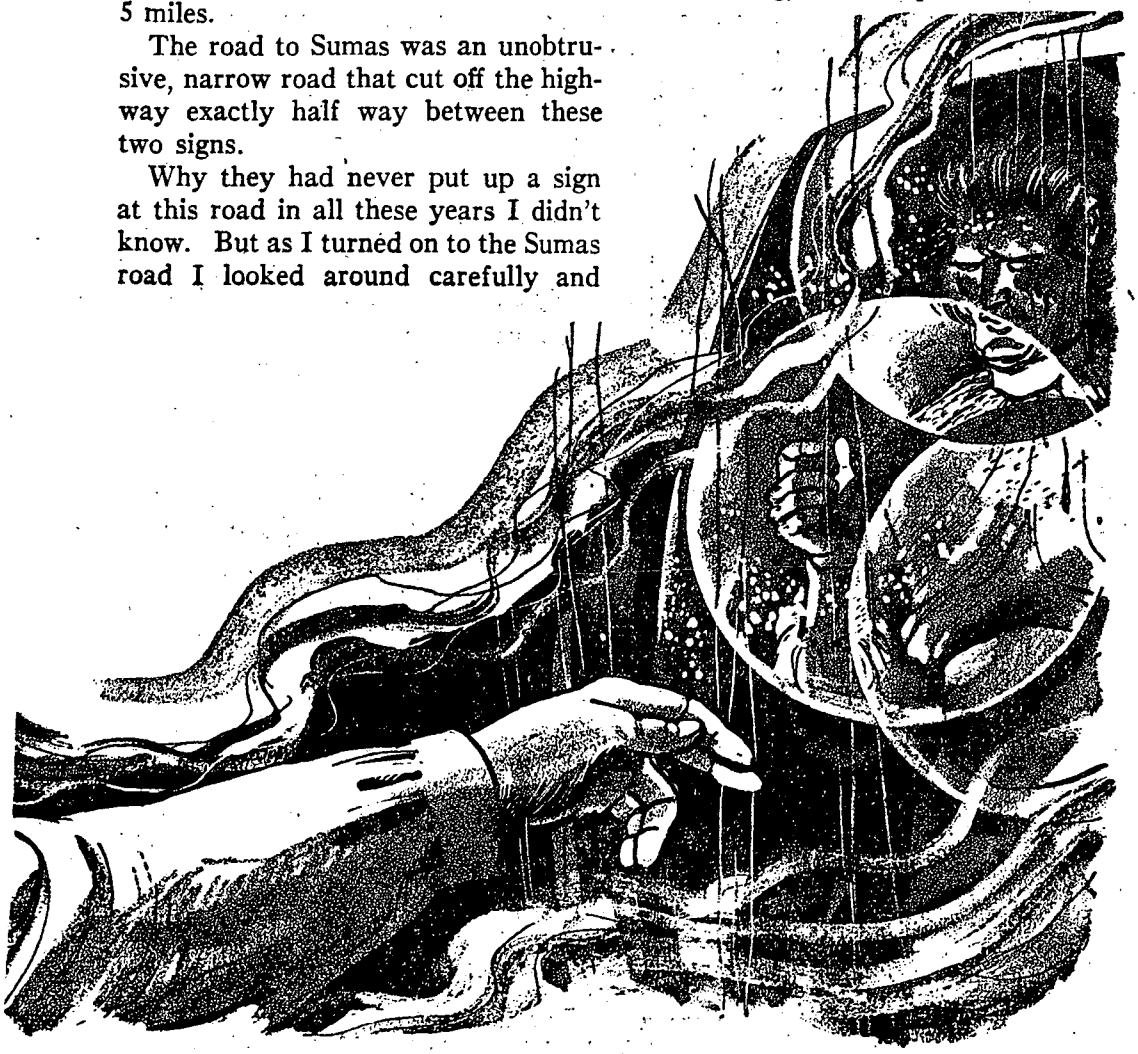
I HAD been to Sumas, Washington, before, so I wasn't fooled by the lack of road signs. The other time had been several years before. I remembered the trouble I'd had. A sign had pointed along the concrete road, saying, Sumas 5 miles. A mile farther another sign pointed back the way I had come, and it had also said, Sumas 5 miles.

The road to Sumas was an unobtrusive, narrow road that cut off the highway exactly half way between these two signs.

Why they had never put up a sign at this road in all these years I didn't know. But as I turned on to the Sumas road I looked around carefully and made sure that, whatever the reason, there still was no sign.

I felt triumphant and self-satisfied that my memory had outwitted the simple trap designed to keep people from ever coming to Sumas. And perhaps the lack of one roadsign WAS the reason why Sumas had never grown.

The town was just as it had been years before; one main street two blocks long, an antique frame hotel



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three stories high, old fashioned drug-store with high stools made of bent, quarter-inch iron wire at the varnished soft drink counter and tables and chairs of the same "gay nineties" design distributed over the sagging, much mopped floor.

I glanced through the windows of the drug store as I pulled toward the curb. The Coca Cola signs were still the same ones, put out in the twenties, flyspecked and dirty, and still in the same positions.

And as I walked the quarter of a block to the corner entrance of the aged hotel, I glanced down the side street to the left and verified my guess that the one theater had not changed. Its sign, RIALTO, was still the antique, light globe affair that had been modern thirty years before.

Since I would be here for several days this time I was determined to go to the show at least once before I left and see for myself whether they showed talkies, or just ran the silent pictures I suspected they did.

Sumas, I knew, had "died" shortly after the United States entered the first world war. Most of its business when it was a boom town was with the Canadians, and the high duties the Canadian Government had imposed on imports to Canada had killed the town.

My eyes were on the ancient sign of the theater on the side street as these thoughts about the town's history drifted through my mind, so it was entirely my fault that I bumped full tilt into the man.

I stepped back with an apology on my lips. Then I saw his eyes. The apology froze on my lips and I just stared at those eyes.

There was nothing wrong with them that I could describe. They were a clear, deep blue, normal in every physical respect. But IN them was something,—something I couldn't quite pin down.

Perhaps it was my reaction to them rather than anything in the eyes themselves that was startling. But as I stared at them my vision gradually took in other things. Little things.

And suddenly I gasped. His ears were not where they should have been.

PUT your fingers at the hinge of your jaw. To do it you will have to press into the underside of your ear. YOUR ears are where they SHOULD be. This man's ears were about an inch above the hinge of the jaw and half an inch back! They set right on the brain case itself, instead of underneath it.

The nose, lips, jaw, neck, shoulders, and all the rest of the body seemed to be quite normal. The fellow was about five feet ten looked to weigh about one seventy, and appeared to be about twenty-five years old.

He wore overalls, a brown work shirt, and no hat. He was clean-shaven and his hair was nicely cut so that it took the second look to see the displacement of his ears.

It took perhaps ten seconds to notice all I've described. During that time he stood, a polite smile on his lips, waiting for me to step aside so he could go on his way.

My senses came back with a rush. Closing my mouth, which I suddenly realized had been hanging open like a yokel's, I muttered a "Pardon me," and stepped around him.

When I got to the corner entrance to the hotel I looked back. He was slowly walking down the street, his back as enigmatical as had been his eyes and ears.

I pushed open the door and entered the lobby of the hotel with a strong determination to see more of this

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strange man before I left Sumas.

The landlady was an old woman. She had been middle-aged when the hotel had been built. Now she looked a hundred.

I signed the register and answered her greeting with a smile. She remembered me from my first stay, so I took the liberty of asking her about the fellow I had bumped into.

From her I found out that he lived on a farm about two miles east of town, and that no one knew anything about him except that he had come to town for the first time with Jud Pearson, the farmer, about five years before.

No information had been volunteered then, and none had been asked. Since then the fellow had grown to be more or less taken for granted. He kept largely to himself, had come to town by himself most of the time after the first few trips with Jud, spoke like a native, never spent any money, and always behaved.

When I remarked about his ears the landlady shrugged her shoulders and said, "Well, I suppose they ARE a little high, but there are lots of people in the world, and every one of them has his own peculiarities."

As I took my room key and started for the ancient stairway to the second floor she added, "I guess most of the freaks live out in the country away from city folks. But we don't notice them so much."

It was three days later, after I had met and talked with the Canadian I had come up to see, that I got around to looking for the Pearson farm. I found it after some difficulty.

From Sumas I followed the wide, graded gravel road east for a mile and a half. Then I turned south on a narrow, rutted road which wound in and out through the pines for a mile before coming to the mailbox propped on a leaning post with the weather worn name, Jud Pearson, on it,—a lone sentinel beside the wagon road that followed the lines of least resistance through the scrubby pines to the east of the public road.

I stopped the car, trying to think up some excuse for invading the privacy of the Pearson farm. I didn't exactly want to blurt out that I had come out to examine more closely the freak I had bumped into in town.

I decided on the old "looking up a relative of a friend of mine" gag. I actually knew a Pearson in Seattle. Al Pearson was his name. I could say that Al had asked me to look up an uncle of his near Sumas. If I worked that right I might be able to strike up an acquaintance with this Pearson that would enable me to examine this country freak at my leisure and find out all about him.

With my initial strategy laid out, I turned the car into the wagon road, and, keeping it in second, crept among the trees and wild shrubbery. The house was back in quite a ways. The wagon road climbed three small hills, dropping again into shallow, flat stretches, before I reached the clearing where the house and ramshackle barn stood.

Beyond them appeared about a hundred acres of cleared farm land, most of which was in pasture, with several surprisingly good looking milk cows grazing peacefully.

Several hundred white hens dotted the clearing. A black and white shepherd dog ran down to meet my car, barking a friendly greeting, as I coasted to a stop near the weather-beaten, unpainted frame house.

AS I stepped out of the car the man with the high ears rounded the

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corner of the house from the back and came to meet me.

There was a wide grin on his face as he recognized me.

"Hello," he said, holding out his hand.

"Hello," I answered, shaking his hand. It felt hot in my grip.

His clear, blue eyes carried a warm welcome. And I again felt that hidden something that affected me so strangely. With a boldness I was far from feeling I looked into those eyes, analyzing.

I scoffed at the idea of that strange effect being love. I, an up and coming female doctor, would be very foolish to fall in love with a back country freak; and anyway, I had a very definite idea of what love would be like, and felt quite sure this wasn't it.

No. It was something else. Instinct, if you want to call it that, told me that here was something,—alien.

That was the word! Alien! I knew anatomy. I knew it better, perhaps, than I knew any other subject. And I knew that the ears of this man were located in an impossible position.

If his eyes had been upside down, with the lids coming up from the bottom instead of down from the top,—if his mouth had been on one side of his face instead of in the center, he might have been just a freak.

If his ears had been on backward he could have been put down as a freak. But, just as the location of the opening to the inner ear differentiates the skull of early man from that of the ape, so, I knew, this man who was still holding my hand in quite human fashion was not human.

The mind that looked at me through those calm, blue eyes was alien. Of that I was sure. And the effect it had on me was not the human one of love, although I felt a strong liking and attraction toward this being. It was the effect of mental power greater than ordinary. The effect that eyes of great men have when one looks into them and feels the intensity of their intellectual power and genius.

I withdrew my hand from his, with the feeling that it had been I, not him, who had prolonged that handclasp. I felt the color rise to my cheeks, but at the same time I felt rise in me a resolve to be utterly frank and honest with this man.

Following this impulse I said, "I am Dr. Edith Cummings."

This sounded too formal to my ears, so I added with a laugh, "You may call me Edith instead of doctor."

I drew in a deep breath and plunged on, to bare my soul before my courage gave out.

"I bumped into you a few days ago, as you probably remember. I,—I was impressed by you very much. Professionally, that is," I added hastily. "And made up my mind I would find you and make your acquaintance."

I paused and watched him for his reaction. His face remained expressionless, or rather, the warm smile on it did not change.

"Do you mind?" I asked breathlessly.

"Not the least bit," he said, and his voice was low and well modulated, the accent purely native.

"As a matter of fact," he went on, "I had been more or less hoping I would see YOU again. I don't know why. It was a rather illogical hope any way you look at it. I told myself it was a hope just based on my loneliness."

"Are you lonely?" I asked, then bit my lip at the question. It sounded just like a come-on line, to invite him to lay his head on my lap and confide how no one had ever understood him.

"Not lonely, exactly," he said, ap-

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parently unaware of the trite implications of my question. "I am very happy here, and Jud is a fine companion. He's taught me everything I know, and even spent a lot of his hard earned money on books so that I could learn more than he knows, in the hope that I could remember something about myself."

"What do you mean, 'remember something about yourself'?" I asked.

"My earliest memory dates back to July 5, 1939," he said. Then, remembering he had not introduced himself, "My name is Harvey Pearson. Jud gave me that name when he found me unconscious out in the pasture. When he found me he brought me into the house and took care of me. I was unconscious for a week after he found me. And when I woke up I couldn't remember a single thing about my past life. Since then I haven't had even a glimmer of memory out of the past."

HARVEY chuckled mirthlessly. "I didn't even remember how to speak. I had to be taught all over again! Since then I've seen babies of the neighbors around here, and kept almost daily watch on their progress as they learned to talk, and they have the same difficulties I had in forming sounds. And from the books I've read on amnesia I've concluded that my loss of memory was a hundred percent complete, even to muscular habits of the lips, because I had great difficulty in learning to pronounce r's and esses properly."

"Did you have to learn how to read all over again?" I asked.

"Yes, I did," he answered. "But I evidently retained some of my intelligence," he added with a chuckle, "because I have learned more in the seven years of my mental growth than even child prodigies like the quiz kids do in seven years."

"Tell me more about when you first regained consciousness," I said.

"All right, Edith," Harvey said. Unaccountably I felt a warm feeling at his calling me Edith. The way he pronounced it was no different than the way it had been pronounced by hundreds of other people, yet there seemed to be a warm caress to it when he said it.

I noticed a bench under a maple tree toward the barn and started walking toward it. Harvey fell in step beside me and began talking about his first memories.

"When I first woke up everything seemed strange. Almost like I had never seen any of it before, or anything like it. Even the room I woke up in seemed queer,—almost like it ought to have a different shape, although I still don't know what kind of shape it should have had.

"I lay there for what must have been an hour, with my head throbbing, and black clouds blurring my vision, trying to remember where I was. It didn't occur to me until later to try to remember WHO I was. I guess I just took it for granted that I knew who I was.

"I was in Jud's bed in the bedroom. The blanket, even, seemed strange. When I could see without too much pain I spent part of my time trying to figure out what it was. I studied the way it was woven out of threads. I studied the walls and the furniture, trying to remember them, but they all seemed utterly new to me.

"I tried at first to get up, but each time I tried my head would ache so unbearably that I finally gave it up.

"But I did manage to shift my position so that I could see out the window a little. The vegetation and the cows and chickens, too, seemed new, and something I had never seen before."

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"I want to ask a question," I interrupted. "Did you do all this thinking in words?"

The question was evidently one he had not asked himself before, because he stopped walking and looked startled. His eyes held a new respect as he looked at me, puzzled.

"That I don't know," he answered. "In my puzzling over those first few hours and days I have unconsciously assumed that I was thinking in English, but now that you ask I know I wasn't. I don't know whether it was in words or not. But all my detailed first memories are in words. The words I didn't learn until later."

"That's interesting," I said.

WE REACHED the bench under the maple tree and sat down. The dog had followed us, and now lay down in front of us, his adoring eyes regarding the face of his master in rapt attention.

"After I had been there for about an hour," Harvey went on, "Jud came in. I've analyzed my first impressions of him over and over again. And there I have the ONLY clue to my past. I had a distinct feeling that his ears WERE TOO LOW, and that HAVING YOUR EARS TOO LOW WAS A SIGN OF INFERIORITY.

"That feeling was very distinct. Even now I catch myself classing Jud in the same category as Barney." He nodded toward the dog who got up and nuzzled the knee of his master at hearing the sound of his name.

"I had the distinct feeling that high ears, as Jud calls them, are normal, while low ears are subnormal. But that's a very slim clue. It's important mainly because I am sure I felt his ears were abnormal before I had seen myself in a mirror and knew my ears were high on the sides of my head."

Harvey leaned over and picked up a small rock. Then, resting his elbows on his knees and tossing the rock from one hand to the other, he went on.

"Jud named me High-ears when he found out I couldn't talk or remember anything. By the time I had learned a few words he decided he didn't like that name, so he renamed me Harvey. I think he felt that high ears were abnormal and that to call me High-ears was sort of making fun of a cripple."

I was sitting erect, so that Harvey's ears were visible to me, the way he was bent over and resting his elbows on his knees. I watched those ears, fascinated. The opening to the inner ear, unless it slanted directly downward just under the skull, would place his hearing centers almost in the geometrical centers of both sections of his brain. And the hinge of his jaw seemed almost naked with the ears placed so far away. Impossible, anatomically, and therefore the greatest mystery I had ever encountered. If nothing else came of this, and he turned out to be just a freak after all, I determined to at least have the satisfaction of getting pictures of those ears and x-rays of the skull, and getting them in the medical journal.

"I couldn't get out of bed for five days after I recovered consciousness. I slept most of the time for the first three days, and have a vague memory of doing nothing but sleep and eat. And even the food was strange. I couldn't remember any of the tastes. I know that that is due entirely to amnesia, because sweet and sour would be tastes that I would have to be familiar with, yet I wasn't.

"My only amusement those first few days was watching Jud. For some reason everything he did seemed very funny to me. Since then I have learned to read emotions and meanings of facial expression, and even gone to several

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shows in town, so I know he was quite worried about me. I don't know yet why he didn't call a doctor. Somehow, I haven't asked him because I have felt he would think I had questioned his judgment.

"Anyway, everything turned out all right, although I still have a depression in my skull where the injury that caused my loss of memory occurred. Incidentally, that's the only injury I had."

Harvey reached up and parted his hair carefully with his fingers, exposing a deep indentation in his skull. It had indeed been an ugly wound. My doctor brain looked at it with professional interest. Here, at least, was something definite I could do. I would take Harvey back to Seattle with me and get the best brain specialists to operate. Then maybe his memory would return.

"How did you get out in the pasture where Jud found you?" I asked.

"I must have wandered there from someplace," Harvey replied. "Jud says I was just laying there unconscious. I didn't have a stitch of clothes on either. Not a thing that would provide a concrete clue. Jud himself thought of dental work as a possible clue. He said if I had any dental work my description with this dental work could be given to the dental association and they could find out who I am. But my teeth are perfect. No fillings and none missing. So that didn't pan out.

"I suppose if anyone but Jud had found me a doctor would have been called in, I would have been advertised nationally, and my identity would have been found out by now," Harvey went on. "But Jud was a lonely man. He's a bachelor and getting along in years. He liked me and even resents my talking to the neighbors. I think he's afraid I will leave him, and he wants me to stay here with him.

"After the first week Jud and I both knew I couldn't remember anything, so he set out to teach me how to talk again. The first couple of months were slow. My head ached excruciatingly most of the time, and I was so weak that I couldn't move around much. I almost had to learn how to walk again. I used a chair as a pair of crutches, pushing it ahead of me when I moved around the house until my legs got strong enough to support me. Every muscle in my body seemed tired all the time at first. But after three or four months I could walk by myself fairly well. It took almost two years for my strength to return sufficiently for me to hold my own in the farm work with Jud.

"Two months after I came here I could talk enough to get along with Jud. Then he taught me how to read. That only took a couple of weeks. And after that everything went pretty smoothly, mentally. My headaches got milder and would even go away sometimes for a week at a time."

HARVEY became silent. His head was raised and his eyes were looking over the pasture where the cows grazed with steady persistence. His cheeks, lightly tanned, were perfectly smooth. I suddenly realized that he probably had no need of shaving. There wasn't a sign of stubble. His hair line was unusual, too. It was normal in front, dipping down on the sides and then up around the ears, to go down behind them and blend into the neck in back. But there was no hint of side burns. Also there was no indication of a natural part in the hair, which was combed neatly back in a pompadour.

He broke the silence again.

"Jud is in town today," he said. "He

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seems determined that he will get everything in the way of books for me he can. He sold the calves last week and sent for the Encyclopedia Britannica—a second hand edition he found advertised in a Seattle paper. I'm anxious to read it, because Jud says it has everything known to the human race in it."

Harvey looked up at me with a smile. "That's all there is," he said. "In the seven years of my life as I know it I've stayed here, reading the books Jud bought me and working with him around the place, helping him with his work. I go to town once in a while, visit with the neighbors, and until recently I was quite content with nothing more. Lately, however, I've felt the urge to see the world and make a serious effort to find out who and what I am.

"I must be somebody. My high ears should be a definite clue that will link me with some part of the world. I seem to be more intelligent than the average person around here, and certainly can get work someplace in Seattle where I can do more toward establishing my identity."

"I think I can help you there," I said. "I told you I was a doctor. I'm not a brain specialist, but I feel confident that your memory can be restored by a simple operation, and I know just the doctor who can do it, if anyone can. Would you like to go back to Seattle with me and try it?"

As he hesitated I added, "There are also the missing persons bureaus all over the world. We could tell them about you and they could be searching through their files for persons disappeared in May and June of nineteen thirty-nine."

"Jud won't like it," Harvey said doubtfully. "He has been dreaming for a long time of getting me the encyclopedia."

"You sound like you were afraid of being operated on," I said with a laugh. "I don't blame you for that, because it will be rather dangerous. I wonder that it didn't kill you instantly to have your head pierced so deeply right over the pituitary. It might even be that Dr. Sorenson will refuse to operate. But I would like to take you to him and have him look at you anyway, Harvey."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Harvey said. "You'll have to go pretty soon, because if Jud sees you here it will spoil everything. You give me your address in Seattle and I'll come down in a couple of weeks. I'll advance it as my own idea. That way he can't have any objections."

"All right," I agreed, hunting through my purse for one of my cards. "Meanwhile I'll talk to Dr. Sorenson about you and get him interested enough so that he will see you when you get there."

He took the card and put it in a light tan billfold he took out of his overall pocket. Then we rose and walked back to the car.

I'VE never been subject to amnesia myself, yet there is not the slightest trace of memory of Harvey putting his arm around my waist. There seems to be a blank stretch of memory from which I seemed to recover with the realization that his arm was around my waist and had been for at least a minute.

Against my will, I felt a sense of peace and well being. And when we got to my car it seemed the most natural thing in the world to turn toward him. As if we had done so thousands of times, we kissed each other.

Then I was in my car, backing and

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turning around, and heading into the wagon road back toward the highway. My last view of Harvey was in the rear view mirror. He stood where I had left him, erect, his arms hanging gracefully at his sides, and his eyes watching my car.

There was no longer any question. My interest was only partly professional.

During the next two weeks I alternately walked in the clouds and talked myself into a state of professional coldness toward my "patient" as I referred to Harvey. I had seen Dr. Sorenson, the brain specialist, and he had been for making a trip up to Sumas to see this medical marvel at once. Only on my strongest assurances that Harvey would arrive on time had he given in and contented himself to wait.

He crowded his schedule both forward and backward so that he would have several days to devote exclusively to Harvey. He made plans for complete x-ray analysis of Harvey's body and head, got several other doctors enthusiastically interested so that a complete clinical analysis could be made in short order, and reserved a room and the main operating room at the Swedish Hospital.

At my insistence, however, he refrained from notifying the newspapers.

Catching a little of his professional enthusiasm, I contacted a national detective agency and put them to work on the problem of finding out who disappeared in May, June, or the first part of July in nineteen thirty-nine that had abnormally placed ears, no beard on his face, was around twenty-five years of age, and could be any nationality.

They assured me it might take several weeks, but that they could definitely determine if anyone, any place in the world, answering to that description, had disappeared then, or any reasonable time before that interval.

Then there was nothing left to do except wait. My practice was quite heavy, so that time passed swiftly. Then, at last, the Day came.

I didn't know how Harvey was coming or when, so I showed up at the office bright and early. All engagements for the day had been cancelled and all emergencies were to be shuttled to Dr. Jacobs, who was my stand-in for vacation periods, just as I served as his when he was out of town.

FRANKLY, I had let my emotions run away with me. At the moment my future and my career meant nothing. All that mattered was that Harvey was coming. I don't know what I would have done if he hadn't showed up; but he did come, shortly after eleven, so that I was spared the unimaginable suspense of an afternoon of floor pacing and repeated trips to the mirror to make sure my beauty parlor job was still perfect.

He still wore the overalls and brown shirt. When he walked in the door I was sitting behind my desk in my inner office, the door open so that I could see who came in.

I continued to sit there while he walked across the waiting room to my door. I was busy composing my mind so that I would not appear the gushing female who rushes up to the man and practically throws herself at his feet. I had it bad but I was determined not to show it any more than I could help.

I felt a momentary amazement that I could feel that way about a freak. Harvey's ears, as he walked toward me, seemed utterly, impossibly freakish. But when I let my eyes contact his, I knew that I was hopelessly, deliciously lost.

The smile on his lips was polite and detached. I sensed that he had de-

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termined not to take advantage of that kiss. I matched his mood, myself determined not to let him know it had meant anything to me more than any other kiss.

A terrible thought flashed across my mind that maybe that kiss had been strictly impersonal. After all, if he had total amnesia he should not remember about kisses. Perhaps he had thought from his reading that putting his arm around me and kissing me was as normal an exchange between man and woman as a handshake! The thought sent terror into my soul.

I stood up as he passed the threshold of my inner office and walked around my desk to meet him. Holding to a strictly cordial welcoming routine, I held out both of my hands and said, "Well, Harvey. I'm glad you made it. I'm glad to see you."

He took my hands in his, and I saw a doubt cloud his eyes. This was replaced by a daring look that made my heart jump. I knew what was coming, so I closed my eyes. There was no longer any doubt.

Or was there? NOW he loved me. Of that I was sure. Perhaps it was a love born of loneliness, and in the fact that I was perhaps the first woman that had talked to him who did not have a husband. After the operation, when his memory was restored, there were so many possibilities.

He might forget all about the past five years or seven years. He might remember that he was already married. He might have a home and family someplace. He might—there were so many possibilities to threaten my happiness.

I thrust them out of my mind and called Dr. Sorenson to tell him Harvey had arrived.

Dr. Sorenson told me to bring him down to the tenth floor clinic. There I introduced him to the doctor and the other doctors who were in on the secret of Harvey.

Harvey smiled tolerantly as they hastily got over the social politenesses and began examining his characteristics like he was some unhuman specimen. He noticed the look on my face and gave me a very human wink.

Inside of half an hour several things had come to light that were sensational. Harvey's body temperature was a hundred and three, and four tenths. His blood type was distinctly new and had a third body in it in addition to the red and white corpuscles. This third body seemed to combine the features of both the white and the red corpuscles, being red in color, and turning blue with carbon dioxide; and having a nucleus like the white corpuscles.

THE placement of his organs seemed to be entirely normal in every respect. The urinalysis, hastily made, showed nothing remarkable, but, as one of the doctors said, would probably bring to light several unusual features when there was more time to give it detailed tests.

A fluoroscope examination of the head wound showed that the brain structure was entirely different than any before known in either humans or animals.

The ear drums were connected by a small tube that WENT DIRECTLY THROUGH THE MID-BRAIN. At the exact center of the brain a tiny tube went down from this transcranial tube through the cleavage of the brain halves to the sinuses. In the normal person this eustachian tube went from each inner ear to the throat!

The fluoroscope also showed that IF the pituitary were where it should be, the head wound would have killed Harvey instantly, because it would

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have crushed this delicate gland, and to touch it lightly in the normal brain means instant death.

So there we had it! As a doctor I could draw conclusions just as quickly as the others. It was obvious. My mind accepted it as obvious.

My heart was another thing, though. What to my intellect was the greatest discovery of the ages was to my heart the greatest tragedy, the greatest blow, any woman could ever experience.

HARVEY WAS NOT A HUMAN BEING. My heart in frantic desperation searched for some possible explanation that would allow him to be human.

Perhaps a mutation! I suggested it to the others.

"Mutation?" they echoed incredulously. "That's out of the question. No mutation made had triune blood and an ear that did not follow the path of human evolution."

It was Dr. Sorenson that spoke the words I had been dreading to hear, yet knew they would be spoken.

"I doubt very strongly," he said, "that this boy is even a product of this planet! There are examples of convergent evolution among fish on this planet. It is less absurd to postulate convergent evolution of external form of two intelligent races on two different planets than it is to postulate a mutation as radical as this one would have to be if Harvey had human parents. I'll bet even the animals where Harvey came from have a triune blood and the same type of ears that Harvey has!"

I sank into a chair. All that Harvey had said up there in Sumas came flooding back into my memory to prove what Dr. Sorenson had just said.

The strangeness of everything to Harvey. Even cloth had been something new to him. And his feeling that normal, human ears were subnormal and that high ears were normal.

A tear squeezed past my eye lids and dropped onto my cheek. I closed my eyes tightly to hold back the tears.

Then I felt Harvey's arms around me.

"Don't take it like that, Edith," he said softly, an infinite compassion in his voice.

The image of Barney, the dog, looking up at Harvey with a look of worship in his eyes, appeared in my tightly closed eyes.

Would I have to worship Harvey as Barney worshipped him? The thought was unbearable. I was a WOMAN. Not an inferior creature. Yet the impersonal voice of science spoke coldly in my brain and said, "It is quite improbable that two races of beings whose evolution has always been entirely separate could produce a common offspring."

The woman in me rose above convention and inhibition. In a sobbing voice I heard myself say, "I LOVE you, Harvey. Could the instinct of a woman go that far wrong? You MUST be just a mutation of the human race. You MUST be."

Dr. Sorenson's voice spoke, the doctor in it replaced by the friend.

"I wouldn't worry about that too much, Dr. Cummings. You may be right. He may be a human after all. And even if he isn't, there are lots of couples that get married who can't have children."

He chuckled at a sudden thought. "Maybe you could have children at that. Such a blessed event would be of tremendous scientific interest to the world. To BOTH worlds, whatever the other may be."

I pushed Harvey away and dried my eyes. Finally I had composed myself enough to speak.

"What of the operation?" I asked

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Dr. Sorenson.

"That will require a great deal of thought," he answered slowly. "Naturally we don't want Harvey to die. Then we would lose all chance of finding out where he came from, aside from other reasons. Yet he must have a pituitary or its equivalent. And there is no way of finding out where it is. If I ran into that it would kill him."

He parted the hair on Harvey's scalp and examined the indentation carefully. His "Hmm's" were those of the abstract surgeon examining a specimen.

"IT'S possible I can do it without running much risk," he finally said. "I could cut away the indented bony structure and lift it away without touching the brain itself. Then the pressure would relieve itself gradually. Normal channels might reassert themselves without further surgery."

"Yes," he concluded with confidence, "It will have to be done. And I think it can be done with little risk. Send him over to the hospital and I'll phone for them to get him ready. There will have to be preliminary tests. Maybe ordinary anesthetics won't work with him."

"Why not try a few tests now?" asked Dr. Roberts, the eye, ear, nose, and throat specialist.

"It would be better to wait for the blood and urine analysis," Dr. Sorenson replied. "They'll tell us most of what we need to know about the basic functions of his body. They don't seem too alien to be amenable to the same chemistry as any other human." He chuckled with evident enjoyment of the work ahead.

"We'll have to list you temporarily as a human being, Mr. Pearson," he said, winking broadly at me. "Otherwise I couldn't admit you to the Swedish Hospital, nor would the Veterinary Doctors Association permit me to operate, and I'm sure Edith wouldn't trust you into the hands of a veterinary."

"I wouldn't talk like that if I were you," I blazed up. 'It's probably the other way around. We should be classed with the dogs. Not him."

"You are entirely right, my dear doctor," Dr. Sorenson said, unruffled by my outburst. "Quite right," he repeated as he left the room.

CHAPTER II

THE foreheads of the three, white masked doctors glistened in the white light of the operating room with beads of perspiration. There was an air of nervous strain in their manner, but their hands were steady with the sure steadiness of machines as they worked over the shaven head of Harvey, who lay unconscious on the operating table, his face partly hidden by the covering of the anesthetic connections.

Behind glass walls that encircled the room were rows of tense faces, eyes glued to the slow, deliberate movements of the trained hands of the three specialists, and the bald head, symbol of the strange mystery embodied in the presence of Harvey.

Tweezers carefully removed bits of bone. Small rotary saws rasped dully against the skull to cut away more of the depressed section that was obstructing the normal functioning of the brain underneath.

Edith,—Dr. Edith Cummings to the audience watching on, stood by and assisted the nurses.

Three hours had passed. It might have been three minutes or three days, so timeless was the concentration and absorption of the minds of these people in the work before them.

Men might travel the spaceways,

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some day in the future, in ships powered by the energy of disrupting atoms, in search of other worlds that contained living, intelligent beings. Astronomers might build giant telescopes to probe further and further into the depths of the cosmos, attempting to fathom the mysteries of Life and the universe. These would be dramatic efforts, requiring years of industry and untold hardships and danger.

Yet here, in the almost noiseless, sterile air of the operating room, men were probing with small bone saws and stainless steel tweezers,—men dressed in spotless white, with rubber gloves, surrounded by sugical apparatus. And their quest was the same. They were striving to restore a memory in an intellect that had beheld the mysteries of the spaceways. A memory of what must be a civilization greater than ours, housed in the body of an alien creature that looked so much like a man and acted so much like a GREAT man. A memory blocked by the pressure of bone fragments that pressed into the soft structure of the brain itself.

Dr. Sorenson dropped the tweezers on the metal table at his side and a nurse handed him a magnifying glass. He peered through it into the gaping hole in the white, shaven skull.

At last he straightened up with a grunt and motioned toward the wound. Then he dropped the glass and stood back.

One of the other white-robed figures took over, applying a transparent jelly and covering the wound with a bandage.

Then he, too, stood back. A nurse closed a valve on a small tank. All watched silently as a rubber bag expanded and contracted rhythmically.

Finally, at a nod from Dr. Sorenson this, too, was disconnected, and the mask removed from Harvey's face.

His face seemed lifeless, a black tube clenched in his teeth as with a grip of death. Robot-like orderlies came in and wheeled the figure of Harvey out of the room.

The three doctors left, accompanied by Edith. Behind the glass walls the spectators were drifting out through the doors into the hallway.

The operation was over.

I WAS waiting for Dr. Sorenson in the hall. When he came out of the doctor's room I hooked my arm in his and walked beside him toward the elevator.

"Do you think he might have his memory back when he comes to?" I asked with forced cheerfulness.

"It's possible," Dr. Sorenson answered. "But hardly likely. It will take from hours to days for the damaged tissue to rise to its former position and resume its normal operations. Even then there is the grave possibility that the cells have been so damaged that they will never re-establish the connection that was lost when that sharp instrument, whatever it may have been, plunged into his skull."

"Gee. I hope he can remember," I said doubtfully. In my mind was the horrible fear that when Harvey remembered he would turn away from me. Fighting it was the feeling that this fear was wrong and selfish. I should be glad that Harvey had a chance to become himself again. I should put in the background my love for him and face the truth. He was not for me. He was an alien—further removed from the human race than is the dog, or even the lizard and the snake. They had blood and ears like the human.

But Harvey had eyes that were more than merely human. And he had understanding and intelligence. And he

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loved me. Or was it merely the love of the part of his mind that had been given life and knowledge by humans?

Could it be possible that when memory came back to that soul that seemed so human and loveable and loving, that memory would bring with it an alien intelligence that scorned the puny wits of Man? A memory that would consider the love of Harvey for me a thing that could only come to a disordered mind?

How would I, myself, for example, react, if I were to wake up some day and find that I had fallen in love with a male ape during a period of amnesia? I knew it would be revolting. I knew that I would not be able to look at my former lover with anything except revulsion.

What would I see in Harvey's eyes, —those calm, blue eyes that carried the hint of vast, superhuman power? How would they look at me when they opened,—memory of all the past, and also of the immediate past, flooding back to mix together and blend in some spiritual alchemy of the soul?

Would they look—revolted? I couldn't stand that.

And yet I felt drawn toward the room where Harvey lay. Drawn with the fatal fascination that one feels, drawing to destruction over the edge of a cliff. I had to be there. I had to see for myself the reaction Harvey would feel in that unguarded moment when memory rushed back.

So I walked and talked cheerfully with Dr. Sorenson, hiding the torture my mind was undergoing. We skipped the elevator and took the stairs to the next floor where Harvey's room was.

He lay there, still unconscious. The nurse took the breather tube out of his throat as we entered. He moved his lips, tasting the anesthetic and experiencing the sickening feeling it gave, even in his unconsciousness.

Dr. Sorenson felt of his pulse for a minute, then pulled back an eyelid. The iris showed, its calm blueness hinting at otherworldliness even in sleep.

The doctor smiled at me encouragingly.

"It shouldn't be more than a few minutes now," he said.

WE STOOD there, the two of us, and watched him. There was a larger bandage on his head than when he left the operating room. The nurse had put an aluminum shield over the first bandage and covered it with a second bandage to protect the wound from the pressure of the pillow.

His breathing was regular. Automatic. Then suddenly it paused for a moment. Several rapid breaths followed. Finally the eyes opened. They paused momentarily as they passed me in their survey, then went on to Dr. Sorenson where they again paused.

There was no expression on Harvey's face, and for the first time his eyes seemed veiled. He tried to speak but his strained throat gave him trouble. After the first few attempts he managed to croak out a request for water.

Dr. Sorenson shook his head and handed Harvey a stick of gum. He looked at it puzzled.

Suddenly I realized he might not have learned what gum was in his seven brief years. I took a stick from Dr. Sorenson's outstretched hand and put it in my mouth and began to chew it.

Harvey watched me, then took a stick himself. In a moment his face brightened. He smiled at me and nodded. The natural movement caused him to wince.

He put an exploring hand to the top of his head and felt of the bandaged aluminum shield. His eyes widened as his sense of touch told him of the

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size of the thing. Then, at the realization of what it meant he chuckled deep in his throat.

"How's your memory, Harvey?" Dr. Sorenson asked.

Harvey looked confused.

"Oh! I remember now," he said. He was silent for a moment, apparently examining his thoughts. Finally he shook his head.

"Just the same as before the operation, doctor," he said. "I'm still just Harvey Pearson, seven years old."

"Well," Dr. Sorenson said soothingly, "that's all right. Your memory may clear up or it may not. We may know more definitely in a few days. Meanwhile, young man, stay right there in bed or you will run into trouble. I think you will be well looked after by Dr. Cummings here." He smiled encouragingly at me, squeezed Harvey's hand, and went out into the hall. He turned back at the doorway and said, "I'll relieve you so you can have some lunch about eleven thirty." Then he closed the door behind him.

I pulled a chair up beside the bed and sat down close to Harvey. He reached over and took my hand in his.

His squeeze reassured me that nothing had changed. I was still, so far as he was concerned as yet, his future bride. The horrible spectre of my becoming his house cat, or of his turning from me in revulsion, still lay in the future.

With a woman's desperate husbanding of every precious moment, I tried to slow Time down in His flight. I wanted to feel the joy of every moment to the full as I sat there looking into the smiling eyes of my love. Those deep, mysterious pools of blue, in whose ocean-like depths lurked hidden memories of other worlds, and powers of thought and expression utterly alien to mine.

HOW soon would these come rushing up to overwhelm me? Would I be carried under, to drown in misery and the suffering of unrequitable love? Or would I be carried high on the crest of the wave of returning memory, to reach the land of my dreams!

Neither Harvey nor I seemed to want to talk. We just held each other's hands and I looked into his eyes, my senses swimming in the heady draft.

It seemed only a few minutes before Dr. Sorenson returned.

"Time for lunch," he said as he came in.

"Oh, can't I have something to eat in here?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"Against doctor's orders," he said. "You don't want to torture Harvey with food he can't eat yet, do you?"

"Of course not," I exclaimed, full of contrition. "I'm sorry, Harvey," I said. "Did I torture you with talk of food?"

"I'm in agony," he chuckled. "Go and eat, you cruel woman. And pick your teeth before you come back. Otherwise I will have to be tied down. I'll go out of my head."

"You're practically out of it already," Dr. Sorenson said. "You can only remember seven years out of anywhere from twenty-five to a possible thousand years."

"What?" I exclaimed, pausing at the doorway.

"Why of course," Dr. Sorenson said. "Hadn't the possibility occurred to you that this boy friend of yours might come from a race that lives thousands of years instead of a paltry few dozen? For all we now know he might have been born before the apes became people!"

I went to lunch much sobered. This was one more possibility that seemed able to split the gulf before me and Harvey even wider. It WAS possible.

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It was MORE than possible. A triune blood, two of whose bodies were capable to fission, so that if the bones ossified too much for production of red cells, the other two could carry on, one of them supplying the oxygen and carrying away the carbon dioxide, almost ensured immortality or at the very least an enormous life span. Harvey could actually BE older than his apparent twenty-five years, judged from appearances.

I ate the meager lunch supplied in the nurses' lunch room rather than walking to the nearest cafe outside. I wasn't very hungry anyway. And in fifteen minutes I was back at the door to Harvey's room.

There I hesitated. What would I see when I opened the door? Would I see MY Harvey? Or would I see an alien intelligence?

Would he throw-up at the sight of me? I tried to cheer myself up by putting it on a humorous basis. After all, up until a little over two weeks ago I had been a happy, self-sufficient, successful, doctor. It was quite conceivable that I could go on being one, if Harvey were to grow sick at the thought of loving me.

Right then I frankly admitted to myself that I wanted more than anything else in the world for Harvey to stay just as he was. I didn't WANT his memory to come back. Selfish or not, I regretted having called in Dr. Sorenson.

I should have let well enough alone.

"So I'm selfish!" I said to myself. "So what!"

But I couldn't wish away the truth. The operation was over. Harvey's memory of his alien past was almost sure to return before long. Maybe it had already.

I clamped my teeth down on my lips and opened the door.

Harvey turned his eyes toward me. I looked into them fearfully. Then I sighed with relief. They were still the same old lovable orbs!

AFTER Dr. Sorenson left I had Harvey to myself for the rest of the day. Somehow he got me started on my work and the story of my life, and before I knew it he was learning as much about me as I knew myself. Perhaps more, because the intelligence of that mind of his, no matter what it might be when the full power of thought returned to it, was even now far greater than that of any ordinary human.

Dr. Sorenson, who was something of a mind specialist as well as a brain specialist, was convinced that the subconscious in Harvey had not suffered much from the blow on the head. He said that if it had, Harvey would have the intelligence now of a normal seven year 'old human, instead of that of genius and more than genius.

He had also said, "If I could only have a small section from his brain, if I only DARED to cut out a small core from the injured section—but if I did, that might be the vital connecting tissue that will link the new memories with the old."

I had almost suspected Dr. Sorenson of hoping Harvey would die so that he could really go to work on exploring that alien and yet so human body and brain.

Special nurses had been assigned to Harvey. Special charts were being made and elaborate tests. I knew that the skin that had been cut back from the indentation in the skull had yielded up a stolen, almost microscopic section which had been rushed off to the laboratory of the best skin specialist in Seattle.

The hair that had been shaved from

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his head for the operation had been rushed to half a dozen different laboratories, and even nail parings had been treated as carefully as chip diamonds.

Before the operation a thousand dollars worth of x-rays had been taken, —all of them stereopticons, so that Dr. Sorenson and his cohorts could build up a three dimensional picture of Harvey's insides.

Even saliva and perspiration had not escaped the thorough brain specialist.

I had not shared my fellow doctors' scientific enthusiasm. My trained, doctor's mind had followed the work of my fellows in a detached sort of way. But the evidence that pointed so surely to Harvey's being alien had so broken down my reserve that I had ceased being a doctor, and had become wholly a woman.

I knew in a vague way that, whatever might come, I must soon resume my medical practice. I had a few thousand dollars saved up, but nothing near enough to serve if I were to see that Harvey received the assistance he would need to take his place in the world as the savior of humanity, the bearer of gifts of superscience from a more advanced civilization.

A woman's daydream? Perhaps. I have always been somewhat of a romantic daydreamer. It was the romantic picture of a woman doctor, saving lives and making medical discoveries that would save lives after I had gone, that prompted me to take up medicine in the first place.

And with the discovery of Harvey these dreams that had been imperceptibly dying in the stifling routine of an overworked doctor whose most noble accomplishment had been to perform a caesarean successfully, according to conventional procedure a half a century old—those dreams had come alive again, but in a different direction.

I would be the noble woman in the background, selflessly serving my fellow man in the double capacity of minister to the sick, and provider of cash for the work of this savior of mankind whom I loved with a hopeless love.

My conscious mind was not completely aware of all these thoughts. A psychoanalyst might have said that my subconscious, realizing the inevitability of Harvey's love turning to revulsion or at least to the friendship of a man toward his dog, had hit upon the martyr defense, building up the picture of myself as a selfless martyr. And maybe he would be right.

At any rate, as the days wore on and Harvey's memory showed no signs of returning, I approached the state of mind where I could feel confident that when his memory came back, IF that dreaded look of sick loathing at the memory of love for a lesser beast appeared in his eyes, I could understand and feel sorry for HIM rather than myself.

A MONTH passed swiftly. Dr. Sorenson had put a silver plate over the brain where the bone covering had been taken away. The skin had been laid back in place and already was healing nicely.

Harvey's hair, at least, was human. It was almost an inch long and stood up like a German haircut.

In that month following the operation Dr. Sorenson and his fellow workers had accumulated enough material to fill a thick book. They had even made arrangements for it to be published as soon as possible in book form.

When Harvey left the hospital he and I dropped into Dr. Sorenson's office and met—not a doctor, but a boy with a new toy. Dr. Sorenson had just received the "skeleton" of Harvey,

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complete in every detail.

It was made of gypsum with wire reinforcement. But it looked exactly like bone. The skull gave us a toothy grin as we went in. The whole skeleton looked to me like a job by a very skilful worker who didn't know too much about the details of anatomy. Especially the skull. The ear holes were in the geometrical center of the thin, flat section of the side walls of the cranium. The brain case as a whole was too large and too uniform in shape to look natural. But Dr. Sorenson assured me that it was the exact duplicate of Harvey's skull, down to almost a hundredth of an inch in every detail.

While we were there we looked through the hundreds of photographs and x-rays and microphotographs and the reams of laboratory analyses.

It was then that Dr. Sorenson asked me to write this account of Harvey. I only half way promised. The story could come later. Much later so far as I was concerned. Harvey was still MY Harvey. We were going to be married right away.

Harvey had asked me to be his wife the day he had been told he could leave the hospital any time he wished. I remember every word of that conversation. I had been sitting by the bed, holding one of Harvey's hands in both of mine as usual. Then suddenly Harvey broke the silence.

"Edith," he had said. And there was a tender, almost humble tone in his voice that told me what was coming.

"Yes, Harvey," I said.

He looked at me for a moment without speaking. Then he smiled.

"Will you marry me, darling?" he asked.

I wanted to shout YES at once. I wanted to dance and sing. I wanted to cry. But I knew there was something I had to say first. So, in a quiet voice, with my eyes turned away from those gentle, blue flames in his, I told him of the spectre that had haunted me since I first realized that he must be from an alien race on a different planet. I made him realize that there was a possibility he would be filled with revulsion at the knowledge that he had married me when his memory of his past came back.

I suggested we wait, though my heart was screaming at my mind to shut up and let well enough alone.

And in the end, when my voice died down from sheer emotional exhaustion, his answer had been a deep chuckle. I knew then, beyond any shadow of doubt, that however alien his physical makeup might be, that mind that lay hidden in amnesia would CERTAINLY be just as human as the mind of Harvey.

I guess I cried a little. I was very happy. All my fears and worries had been for nothing, just as they usually are with women. But women MUST worry and fear that the very worst is going to happen, I guess.

DR. SORENSON went to the city hall with us to get the license. There was some trouble when Harvey said he didn't know how old he was. This was smoothed over when Dr. Sorenson explained to the clerk that Harvey had been found by Jud Pearson on his doorstep, so to speak, and had been raised by him.

The license was finally made out. I put it in my purse and clutched the purse tightly under my arm. It held the master key to my future.

We would have to wait a week before the ceremony could be performed. Harvey wanted to go back to Sumas and ask Jud to be best man at the wedding. So I let him go and spent the week at the office taking care of a few odds

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and ends of practice before turning my practice over to my alternate for an indefinite period.

During all this time no inkling of the fact that a visitor from some other planet was on earth had leaked out through the press. There was quite a stir in medical circles, but it had been kept strictly within the family, so to speak. Doctors can be relied on to keep a professional secret, and they have a nightmarish fear of publicity and public announcements that might later turn out to be false anyway.

Harvey came back the day before the wedding and brought Jud with him. I could see that Jud resented my stealing Harvey away from him. But I could also see the nobler side of him asserting itself. He took the wedding in good grace and sounded like he really meant it when he wished me all the luck in the world.

Some people go to Niagara Falls for a honeymoon. Others go to other places such as resorts, dude ranches, or on cross country tours.

Harvey and I went over on the Olympic Peninsula and camped out in the wilds. I had the camping equipment already packed in the trailer, so that after the ceremony we said goodbye to everyone and started out.

We had lunch at Mukilteo and then rode the ferry to Whidby Island. Harvey drove the length of the island and we crossed the bridge to the mainland of the peninsula at about three o'clock.

When the sun set we were all set in a nice camping spot at the foot of a high mountain.

We spent three weeks in the mountains, fishing in mountain streams, hiking through the trees, climbing up to the snow line on several of the mountains of the Olympic Range.

I was very happy during those weeks. Happier than any mortal has a right to be, I guess. The only thing to mar my happiness was the ever-present spectre of Harvey's memory returning to end my happiness forever.

Each morning I managed to awaken before Harvey. Then I would prop myself on one elbow and wait for his eyes to open. Would they still be Harvey's eyes? Or would the inevitable healing under that silver plate have bridged the gap between the present and the past during the night, so that in the morning I would find myself married to some alien creature?

Each morning I would watch the calm, relaxed face of my husband, worshipping every detail of feature. I would caress the closed lids of those wonderful eyes with loving thoughts.

Then, as the sun bursts soundlessly through the clouds to bathe the earth with His rays, so also Harvey's eyes would open. Then I would hold my breath—watching. And each morning it was Harvey that woke to smile at me and rumple my hair playfully.

By the time the three weeks were up I had almost become convinced that Harvey's amnesia would be permanent. Perhaps the secrets of that alien brain would remain locked forever. It might be a real loss to the world, but to me it would be a permanent state of happiness.

HARVEY had insisted that I keep on with my medical practice. He, himself, was mapping out a definite campaign of study that staggered me. Not content with learning one subject for the purpose of eventually earning a living for the both of us, he planned to embark on a routine of language study, history, science, and medicine that would almost make him a specialist in every conceivable phase of human activity.

If he had been anyone but Harvey

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I would have scoffed at such an ambitious program. With the exception of languages and dissection and lab work, he intended to do the studying without assistance, "Because teachers will slow me down," as he laughingly insisted.

When we got back to Seattle I went back to the office and threw myself into my practice with real pleasure, for I knew that for at least the next year my income would have to provide the books and tutors for Harvey's study.

As the weeks stretched out into months I began to realize the mental power of his mind. In four months he could talk fluently and with no trace of foreign accent in sixteen different languages. At least the native instructors assured me there was no trace of foreign accent in his pronunciation.

I would drop in at the house for a moment between calls and find Harvey with a dozen different foreigners, and he would be conversing rapidly with all of them. His German, I knew, was flawless. I knew quite a bit of German myself.

Dr. Sorenson dropped in occasionally to "watch the progress of his patient" as he said. But I knew that he was studying Harvey. Once when Dr. Sorenson and I were alone together he said, "Do you know that Harvey can now listen to three people talking in three different languages at once, so that to anyone else the sounds are a meaningless jumble, and understand what all of them are saying? Try listening to three people talking in English at the same time and see how impossible that is."

"How can he do it?" I asked laughingly.

Dr. Sorenson shook his head in puzzlement. "There is some quality his ears have that ours don't," he said. "They're able to take a senseless jumble of sensible sounds and separate them into their sensible parts."

A whole year passed by. On our first anniversary it seemed to me that we had been together for a hundred years. The day I had first set eyes on Harvey seemed so far back in the dim, remote past, that it was hard to believe it had been only a little over a year before.

Dr. Sorenson had planned a surprise party for us, so all our own, well laid plans "gang aglee" or something. They almost didn't, though, because we hadn't consulted anyone, and were within fifteen minutes of getting in the car and disappearing into the wilds of the Olympics for the day when the host of doctors and their wives, and tutors of all nationalities and their wives, descended on us to make a day of it.

I got even with them all before the day was over, though. Woman-like, I picked that day to have a dizzy spell. I knew what it was. With the first wave of dizziness, before anyone else had time to notice anything wrong, I KNEW.

And I knew from the feverish glint in Dr. Sorenson's eyes as he knelt over me where I had fallen on the lawn that, short of seeing Harvey's memory return, this event was the thing he had been looking forward to the most.

I kept pretty close to home during the ensuing months. Harvey had turned his study to physical science and radio. Our home was in Laurelhurst, on the shore of Lake Washington. He built a long, low workshop on concrete pilings just off the shore, connected to the shore by a long dock.

When I had gone daily to the office I hadn't realized what terrific drive and energy he possessed; but, at home most of the day, I was continually amazed. Harvey did more physical work in a day than three normal men. In addition, he always had tutors at his elbow

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who kept up a continual run of multilingual conversation, gave lectures on hundreds of subjects, and read everything from advanced mathematical works to history books to him. This, while his fingers worked almost faster than the eye could follow at various electrical and mechanical projects.

Gradually there took shape in his workshop a gigantic, incredibly complex structure whose nature I could not even begin to guess at.

AND still there was no sign of his memory returning. Word association tests were thought out by several different doctors. None of them brought any response from the other side of the amnesic block in his mind.

Continual physiological tests were made, to add data to the already enormous accumulation of previous data concerning Harvey's body.

Now even I had to undergo these tests. X-ray plates of the progress of the embryo within me were made almost daily.

The child seemed to be more of a drain on my strength than a normal offspring ordinarily is. As soon as this was noticed I had to submit to fatigue tests every other day.

I grew accustomed to being regarded as a laboratory specimen. But, in spite of myself, I grew restless and a trifle irritable.

Being a doctor I recognized this irritableness for what it was—just a symptom. So, rather than afflict my friends and fellow doctors with it, I worked off my restlessness in the evenings, walking among the shrubs between the house and the lake shore.

Often, for an hour or two at a time, I would lie back in one of the reclining, canvas lawn chairs. My eyes would turn toward the heavens. I would try to pierce the blue veil of the heavens and "see" where my husband had come from, just as I still peered into the blue depths of his eyes—deep down to where the mystery of his life lay hidden.

They were much the same; the blue of the silent heavens, and the blue of his eyes. And the sky seemed to calm me in the same way that he had a calming effect on my soul.

I gloried in the knowledge that I now "belonged." A child of earth, I had as a mate a child of the universe. And within me, growing ever stronger, was the child of us both.

It did not trouble me that that child might be utterly different than either of us—a monstrosity. It did not trouble me that it might be a sterile offspring of two incompatible bloods. Nothing bothered me as I reclined there on the lawn at night and communed with the stars.

Worry needs occasional fuel to keep alive. All my fears, all my worries, had borne no fruit. I had lived the happiest year of my life without a single dark cloud materializing. And so, gradually, I had become an optimist. I felt a conviction that Destiny would not allow my child to be anything other than normal and wonderful—like his daddy.

And then, one night, on sudden impulse I decided to steal down to the workshop and peek in.

I didn't consider it as eavesdropping. I just wanted to see my husband at work without disturbing his work in any way. If I had walked down in the ordinary way the noise of my coming would have brought him to the door to greet me. While I was there he would leave his work and devote all his time to me. It had always worked out that way.

I wanted to see him at work. I wanted to see him when his eyes were

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concentrated on something complex, the superhuman power of his mind working with quiet, controlled efficiency like the banks of generators in a huge hydroelectric plant I had once seen.

Others had seen him that way and marveled. I wanted to see him, too, when his thoughts were not on me, but on his work.

So I stole quietly down to the shore. There I slipped off my house slippers and walked along the dock in my bare feet. At last almost breathless from the exertion of keeping quiet, I reached the wall of the workshop.

I slipped past the door and paused at the first window. It was halfway open at the bottom. Voices were coming through. One of them was Harvey's and the other was strange. They were in a language unfamiliar to me.

I listened for a few moments before daring to peek in. I felt a disappointment, because I had thought Harvey would be alone. I thought all his visitors of the day had gone hours ago.

I pouted, and felt a sinking sensation at the thought of having to go all the way back to the house by myself.

The voices broke off from the strange language. There was a moment of silence. Then Harvey's voice started in again.

"To be: muh-wahh," he said. "I am; goinyabwohh. You are; goinyee-ah, puh-hong."

His voice went on, slowly and distinctly pronouncing each syllable. I dared to peek through the window.

There was no one there except Harvey. He was standing in front of the huge contraption he had spent so long to build.

In the frosted glass panel set into the machine I saw something that made me excited. There, as big as life, was the television image of a man like Harvey. The ears were in the same position as Harvey's. The lips were moving, but no sound came out.

Those lips were repeating the language lesson after Harvey.

My first reaction was delight. Harvey's memory must have returned. The fact that he was communicating with one of his kind made that obvious.

I wanted to rush in and throw myself in his arms, for joy at his returned memory.

Then logic, that cold, inhuman process that plants itself in the mind of man as a leech, whispered coldly, "But he must have recovered his memory long ago. It took time to build this contraption."

I DON'T know how long I stood there beside the window. My heart had turned to lead. The hypnotic droning of Harvey's voice as he slowly gave the language lesson to the alien creature whose image spoke silently in the frosted glass screen beat into my brain. Every intonation of that alien tongue, every association of meaning, seared itself on my tortured brain, never to be forgotten.

At last Harvey's voice stopped. Fearful that he might find me there I hurried back along the dock, found my slippers where I had left them, and half ran and half walked back to my lawn chair.

There Harvey found me fifteen minutes later when he left the workshop. I pretended to have been asleep. It was easy enough to lay my upset appearance and my distraught looks to illness.

I wanted time to think. I wanted time to allow him to volunteer the information that his memory was restored. WHY WAS HE KEEPING IT SECRET? I must find that out.

He still loved me, even though he was

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now that alien being I had so much feared would be revolted at the thought of me. No matter how successful he might have been at hiding the return of his memory, he could not possibly have hid from me a revulsion toward me.

He carried me up to the house and put me to bed. He was—oh, so gentle with me. I couldn't believe that it was possible he might be harboring— The thought burst into my brain past the barrier I had placed in front of it. FACTS indicated that it might be possible that Harvey was harboring inimical thoughts against the race that had taken him in and taken him to their hearts.

I couldn't believe it. Yet I KNEW that tomorrow night I would again steal down the path to the lake and listen as Harvey taught his alien student the English language. I KNEW that I would listen, and let his hypnotic teaching voice beat the alien words into my brain.

Why? Because I must KNOW what he was up to. I must find out for myself because I dared not confide in anyone.

If I told anyone—even Dr. Sorenson, then it would be out of my hands. And I loved Harvey too much for that. Too, there was my child—Harvey's child. He was a bond that might even make it possible for ME to turn traitor to my kind, to be loyal to my husband.

Harvey left me to my thoughts after serving me some hot tea. I couldn't sleep, though I knew I must to conserve my strength for the next night.

My tortured thoughts struggled in my aching brain, pulling my emotions one way and then another.

I don't know when I went to sleep; but when I awoke the clock said almost noon. I rang the bell for Martha, my old friend and nurse who had insisted on coming each day to cook and keep the house clean after I got too weak to do it myself.

Dr. Sorenson dropped in toward evening. By that time I had managed to look my usual self, so he saw nothing of my new secret.

After dinner with Harvey and Martha I went to my room and set the alarm for ten o'clock. I was husbanding my strength with all my professional skill, just as a shipwrecked sailor will husband his foodstores so that he won't run out before reaching some port.

TEN-thirty found me again outside the window of the workshop. I found I was too early. It was half an hour before Harvey turned on the giant radio and made contact with this other alien being.

Once again I let the hypnotic, droning voice of my husband and lover sear the words of the alien tongue into my brain while he was searing the English language into that other being's mind. After the language lesson was over they talked in that alien tongue for a while. I felt a subdued thrill at being able to recognize the words I had learned and their meanings when they were used.

But I still had too small a vocabulary to get any connected meaning out of the conversation.

After the radio was turned on I didn't dare look in again. And when the talking finally stopped I scurried back the way I had come.

In the days that followed I gradually learned the alien tongue. Harboring my strength by day and taking extreme care never to over-exert myself, I managed to have enough energy to make my lonely way to my post outside the window each night and spy on my husband's treacherous work.

There was not the least doubt in my

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mind after the first two weeks. In that time I gained enough of a working knowledge of the alien language to get a good portion of each of the nightly conversations.

I soon learned that the Other was in a space ship circling the earth inside the moon's orbit. He and his fellows, who numbered several thousand, had been patiently waiting for Harvey to contact them. They had not grown alarmed at the passage of nearly nine years before this contact was made, because they were used to thinking in terms of centuries rather than years.

How incredibly old my husband might be, I could only guess. I learned that his right name was "Kwah-ahh, hah-noh aht. twee, loo. oh LA."

Resting during the day, I would often work on a phonetic spelling that would most accurately reproduce the sounds of the words in the alien language. I found it took a lot of periods and commas. The language was a very hesitant one, slowly spoken.

Also it was highly idiomatic. As I became more expert at it I found that it combined a proper sequence of word meanings with a sort of word shorthand that could convey much in just a few of the slowly spoken, faltering words. It was a very melodious tongue, quaint sounding. The kind of a language one learns to LOVE.

Poetry in English or German always seemed to me a phonetic exercise rather than something beautiful. This language was itself the soul of poetry. And the simplest of poems in it took on a quality of emotional excitation beyond description.

In the thrill of mastering this tongue I often forgot the sinister circumstances under which I was learning it.

Often I was tempted to say something to Harvey in it and watch his surprise and the expressions on his face as deduction after inevitable deduction followed. I refrained from this bit of mischief. It might mean the end of time for me.

The nightly conversations didn't touch even once on the purpose of all the secrecy. They were concerned entirely with earthly things. Customs, languages, science, history—all the things Harvey had worked so hard to master.

I REALIZED now the purpose behind his superhuman efforts. His was the job of getting into the enemy territory and learning all its secrets. His was the simple job of reporting. Intelligent as he might be, the job of mapping the campaign to come was put into the hands of even wiser beings.

I felt helpless. I vacillated between the course of procrastination and action. I even debated whether I should not poison my husband to preserve the safety of the human race from these aliens, hovering out in space, waiting until they had their data complete before launching their attack.

Although there were only thousands of them, I didn't doubt for a minute that when the time came they would "take over" without a hitch.

I marveled at Harvey's acting ability. There had been not the slightest indication when his memory had returned. Never, in any slightest slip of the tongue or knowledge, had he given away his secret.

Even now, after nights of listening outside that window, with a mastery of Harvey's native language in my mind, I found it hard to believe it wasn't all a dream during the day. His untroubled, innocent eyes would caress me as if there were nothing in the world except our little home.

When Dr. Sorenson asked him about his memory from time to time I

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watched him closely. Never did he give the impression that he was telling anything but the truth when he discussed with genuine regret the growing "possibility" that his memory might never come back.

As the time approached when the baby would be born my thoughts began to turn bitter. Memory of a war picture in which innocent-faced Nazis performed horrible deeds with the smile of perfect contentment and normalcy on their lips came to haunt me.

"After all," my fevered thoughts would whisper in my mind, "the smile, the facial expression, is nothing but an accompaniment to the words spoken. As an alien, Harvey would learn ALL the language well, so that he could convey any meaning he wished by facial expression or voice intonation as well as word meanings."

A kiss is a word in the over-all language of man. A smile is the same. To an alien an innocent expression would be no harder to achieve than a guilty one.

And I couldn't really blame him. After all, he was a member of this alien race—not of the human race. But I was a member of the human race. And if it had not been for the child that belonged to BOTH of us—to that patiently hostile race waiting in the blue of the sky, and to the unknowing victims, patiently going about their daily lives below, I would not have delayed.

As it was, several times the words trembled on my lips that would have let Dr. Sorenson in on my terrible secret.

EACH night it grew more difficult for me to hasten back up the path to the lawn chair before Harvey would have time to shut down for the night and leave the workshop.

Toward the last I had to give up and wait for him at the dock, pretending I had just come down to meet him.

I shed many a silent tear in his arms as he carried me, night after night, and laid me gently in my bed. The burden of responsibility for the safety of the whole human race grew heavier and heavier on my weary shoulders.

The night came that I fainted by the door right out on the dock. Harvey found me there and carried me up to the house. My senses returned when we were halfway there.

My heart beat frantically against my ribs. He MUST guess now that I came nightly to spy on him. How could ANYONE keep from guessing that now.

All night I tossed in a frenzy of worry. What would he do?

I pictured him pacing the floor of his room, plotting some way he could kill me without being caught. He would HAVE to kill me to ensure the secrecy of his work. The very fewness of numbers of his race made it imperative that their first attack be a complete surprise to the unprepared world.

In the early hours of the morning a plan came to my mind. Harvey might kill me. But I could still defeat his carefully laid plan to catch the world unawares.

Silently I got out of bed. From the secret drawer in my dresser where I kept the dictionary of this alien language I had made I took it and wrapped it carefully. In the darkness I wrote a hasty note. I addressed both the note and the package containing the dictionary. On each I wrote "Dr. E. L. Sorenson, Medical and Dental Bldg., City."

I knew it would look like childish scrawl the way I wrote it, but I dared not turn on the light.

Softly I stole out of the house and

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down the street. How far it was to the mailbox! The sun was creeping up over the horizon, and the early morning light seemed the only clean thing left in the world.

I was going back as soon as I dropped my precious package in the mail box. Yes. I was going back. I HAD to go back.

Perhaps my husband would be waiting for me. Perhaps he had made up his mind how he would kill me. He would do it, I knew, with the same, innocent, self-composure that he learned a language—with the same calm that a Nazi tortured an Englishman. But I had to go back.

I was going back because I didn't want to live without him. I had gazed into those innocent, hypnotic eyes too often. And with me, causing my legs to weaken and tremble at each step, came the child of this alien being, whose slave I was.

It took my last reserve of strength to reach the mailbox. When the package slipped from my fingers into the opening, and I heard the cover drop back into place, my eyes blurred.

I felt myself sink against the cold metal of the mailbox. Vaguely I knew that I was sliding down. Lower and lower. But just before unconsciousness engulfed me I felt a sense of peace at last. Now the problem would be out of my hands.

It would be in the more capable hands of Dr. Sorenson. There was nothing Harvey could do to prevent that now.

CHAPTER III

I AWOKE to the sound of a baby crying. I lay there, gradually absorbing the impressions of my surroundings. There was the familiar smell of the hospital, the feel of smooth, clean sheets next to my skin.

I laid there without opening my eyes for several minutes. Everything was so peaceful, so—nice. And that baby. Could it be mine? How wonderful!

Then, like an unloosed torrent of foul smelling flood water, memory rushed back to me. Memory of my husband and how I had stolen out of the house with that last message to the world, a warning to prepare, addressed to Dr. Sorenson.

For a moment I couldn't remember dropping it in the mailbox. Panic gripped me. Had Harvey found me in time to prevent my warning from getting out of his hands?

Then realization of where I was calmed my panic. It didn't really matter now. I was alive, and I could tell someone. Harvey wouldn't dare to kill me in the hospital where nurses came in every few moments.

Maybe he wouldn't bother with me. He might just flash the signal into the sky that would bring down the might of this alien race and bring defeat and slavery to the world sooner than it might have come if I had not given my secret away.

I heard the door open and footsteps come in. I couldn't face anyone yet, so I kept my eyes closed and my breathing regular.

"Is she going to be all right?" I heard Harvey's voice whisper. A detached portion of my brain analyzed that voice. The inflection was perfect. It conveyed just the right shade of fatherly anxiety.

"What a marvelously exact mind!" I thought bitterly. "The human race won't stand a ghost of a chance."

"I think so," I heard another voice say. Finally I placed it. It was Dr. Michelson, the gynecologist.

"How's the baby?" It was Dr. Sorenson's voice. The sound of it was as

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a life buoy to a sinking sailor.

"Marvelous. Marvelous!" Dr. Michelson said. "Most amazing thing in history! Believe you me, the absorption of Harvey's race into the human will be to the improvement of both."

"May we see the boy?" Harvey's voice sounded eager. How normal he sounded! Almost, in spite of everything, I could convince myself that he was showing fatherly pride.

"Yes," Dr. Michelson said. "Maybe she'll be awake when we get back."

I heard their footsteps leave the room and die out down the hall. Bitterly I realized that that baby I had heard cry had not been mine. Mine was down the hall someplace. The one I had heard had probably been one a nurse was carrying past my door in the hall.

Cautiously I opened my eyes. The room was empty. I tried to think. That package would take at least a day to reach Dr. Sorenson's office or home. How had I addressed it? To his office.

The stamps I had put on it might not be enough. Then they would return it for more postage. No. They couldn't because I hadn't bothered to put a return address on it.

My female mind was at work again, tormenting itself. Perhaps I hadn't made the address legible enough. Maybe the note and dictionary would wind up in the dead letter office, to be eventually thrown in some post office furnace while the invading aliens swooped down to devastate the earth.

I couldn't help worrying about that package I had mailed at such cost to myself. Perhaps I alone stood between the race of which Harvey was a member and the safety of my own race; I, who had just borne a child that belonged to both!

Footsteps sounded in the hall. It was the men returning. I thought of closing my eyes and feigning sleep again, but my mind was too worn out to attempt it. I just lay there waiting for the first glimpse of my husband, the man who must kill me to preserve his secret—and even that might not prove enough if my message were delivered to Dr. Sorenson as I fervently hoped.

The door opened and Dr. Sorenson's head peeked around it. He gave me a smile, then turned and said, "Yes, she's awake now."

"Good," I heard Harvey's voice say.

The door opened wide and Harvey came into the room. He was carrying the reddest baby I had ever seen. It was almost scarlet!

All my troubles were swept away in the realization that this was MY baby. The first and only baby that was MINE.

IT LOOKED both beautiful and grotesque with its tomato-like skin and its tiny ears pasted too high on the sides of its head.

Its eyes were tightly closed and its tiny, tiny fists were clenched. The mouth and little button of a nose, and that little chin—all were so human.

I didn't need to hide anything. I just needed to lose myself in adoration of my baby. That was all I needed to do.

Harvey sat down on the bed beside me where I could touch my child and assure myself it was real. I made noises like a mother makes instinctively.

Then suddenly he opened his eyes and looked at me. His eyes were deep and blue. "Deep as the sky and blue as the ocean," my mind whispered.

After a while a nurse came and insisted on taking my baby away. Harvey gave me a parting kiss, and the three men went out with the nurse.

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I barely noticed. I just lay, silent, my thoughts far away in the future—the future of my dreams in which my baby grew up to manhood.

I dreamed of him as a boy, clean and strong. I saw him on a football team in some college, then as a doctor or engineer. Perhaps he would even be a statesman — president of the United States!

I know all mothers dream such dreams. But I had more reason to believe in my dreams than other mothers. Mother. The word sounded wonderful! Perhaps he would call me mother, but whatever he called me, even if it was just plain maw, it would be music to my ears. The most wonderful music in all the world.

I dozed for a time. When I awoke all the terrors I had momentarily forgotten were back. Yes, my boy would grow up to be a President. He would be one of the ruling race of what might be left of humanity after the terrible, cosmic weapons Harvey's people must possess were brought into play to subdue mankind.

But maybe I could still do something. I rang for the nurse. When she came I asked for writing paper. Then I wrote a note to Dr. Sorenson telling him I must see him right away, and ALONE.

I made the nurse promise to see that a messenger boy took the note to the doctor as soon as possible. Then I closed my eyes and waited. Perhaps he would already have the package I had sent. Sometimes the deliveries were swifter than usual.

I became restless after an hour had passed, and tried to sit up. The effort sent shooting agonies of pain through my body. My cries brought in a nurse who promptly made me take a white pill. I knew what it was, but I relaxed and let it take effect. I was too weak to struggle any more.

When I awoke it was dark outside. I knew it didn't get dark until after eight o'clock at this time of the year. Dr. Sorenson hadn't responded to my appeal.

I rang for the nurse and asked to see my baby, although I knew ahead of time that I wouldn't be permitted to see him this late.

TO MY surprise she turned wordlessly and went out. In a few moments she was back with the little Indian, my red baby.

I was too drowsy and numb from the sedative to do more than just lay still and look at him. The nurse sat on the edge of the bed and held him where I could watch him. I looked and looked. It seemed I could go on just looking at him forever.

A tear squeezed out of my eye. It surprised me because I was so happy that there was no need for me to cry. Yes, I was completely happy once more. Still, another tear came, and then another.

And I DID cry. All the misery I had been suffering welled up in me, overwhelmed me. And I sobbed quietly like a perfect lady. I couldn't stop. The nurse still sat there and obligingly handed me a fresh cleanex every once in a while, saying nothing. And I just kept on crying.

The tears crept past the cleanex and wet my lips. The salt taste was good. I hadn't tasted anything since early in the afternoon the day before.

I began to think how good some hot soup would taste. Between sobs I asked the nurse if I could have some.

This seemed to strike her funny bone, because she started to laugh. Her laughter was as uncontrollable as my crying had been. And finally I joined her.

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We laughed together until the tears were flowing all over again.

Then she took my baby away and brought me some hot soup. I felt much better.

The next morning the nurse brought me a brief note from Harvey which said that he and Dr. Sorenson had had to go away on urgent business for a couple of days. It promised that they would be back in not later than two days.

This was a new angle. I wondered idly what kind of business it could be. But the nurse brought my son in right after. For the rest of the day I kept quite busy and had no time to think of my troubles.

He wasn't quite so red now. And his eyes stayed open wide, watching me with as much wonder as I watched him. I could almost sense that blank mind behind those eyes beginning to come to life already!

Out of a clear sky he said, "Ghoy-eeah."

Why that was his native word for "you!" Could it be that Harvey's race had inherited memory?

I laughed at myself. The sound had just been a childish gurgle. One of the first sounds a baby makes. Just saliva in his throat and the first spasmodic attempts of his larynx!

I hugged him close. How I loved this bit of my own flesh!

The troubled thoughts in the back of my mind kept trying to assert themselves, but with my son there to keep me occupied I held them back. It would be time enough for them to return to torture me when finally night came.

And when night did finally come the nurse saw the haggard look on my face at the prospect of a night of mental suffering, and mercifully gave me a sleeping tablet.

I AWOKE before dawn the next morning. I knew I was strong enough now to get out of bed. I might do that later on, but right then I just wanted to look at the dark window and wait for the first sign of dawn.

I could see several stars in the sky through my window. I watched them twinkle and wondered how anything harmful could lurk in the innocence of the sky. The answer, logical and impersonal, whispered in my mind, "There are fiery suns out there. That merry, innocent twinkle is from their atomic fires which rage unchecked with more power than the earth could ever know and survive."

There is a blueness of cold and a blueness of warmth. Could the blueness of the sky be both? Somewhere out there was a space ship circling the earth. And in it were several thousand people of Harvey's race.

I began to wonder how their women would look. Of course I could not hope to compete in the mind of my husband with the least of them. The concept of feminine beauty is a race concept. And they were of Harvey's race.

I smiled bitterly to myself. Whatever they might do, they could not undo the fact that I was the mother of Harvey's child. No one could change that.

The stars winked out and the first dim flush of dawn touched the window. A bird chirped with a plaintive note. Then he was silent.

"I'll bet the lazy devil turned over and went back to sleep," I thought to myself.

With a soft chuckle I sat up and let my legs dangle over the edge of the bed. I felt all right so far. Just to be safe, though, I kicked them back and forth a few times to get the blood flowing in them.

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Then I slid cautiously forward until my feet could touch the floor. There wasn't any rug and the wooden floor felt cold under the soles of my feet.

I turned on the light by the side of the bed and looked around for some slippers. I finally found a pair in the cabinet at the head of the bed. I put them on and took a few cautious steps.

So far I seemed to be O.K. I felt hungry more than weak or faint. All my insides had the good, clean feeling of healthy hunger.

I walked over to the door, half sliding my feet ahead of me and hanging on to whatever my hands could reach in the way of support. I didn't want to fall down or I would have to go back to bed again. I didn't want to do that just yet. I had been too weak too long to give up the luxury of walking so soon.

And I knew I HAD to keep occupied or my nightmare of fears and horror would come flooding back upon me.

I didn't know what was going on. It might even be that Harvey had killed Dr. Sorenson and destroyed the papers I had sent him. That note saying they had gone away on business might just be a stall until he had figured out some way to do away with ME.

So I kept walking and managed to keep my dark thoughts in the background.

After a while the nurse came in and made me get back in bed. It was all right now, though. She stayed and gave me a bath, and scolded me. The scolding made me feel glad all over, as Anny Rooney says. It was just the right thing to make me feel at peace with the world.

SOON after another nurse brought me some breakfast. A sanitary-looking soft boiled egg, toast, jam, and steaming hot coffee. I knew that she had made a special trip because coffee won't stay hot more than five minutes in a metal pot. Too many patients of my own had told me that very emphatically in the three years I had been practicing.

Next they brought me my son. How glad I was that I could nurse him! If I hadn't been able to they would not have let him stay very long. Then I would have been alone with my thoughts.

I felt thunderclouds gathering in the background of my mind. I ignored them and smiled and cooed at my baby. That the storm might break at any moment and engulf me did not interest me any more. Even though I might die before the morning was over—even though the whole world might go up in flames, right now I had my baby to tend to. That was more important than anything else.

Suddenly he was there in the doorway. Harvey. I could tell by the way he looked up and down the hall before coming in that this was it.

He closed the door softly behind him, standing with his back to it, a queer smile on his lips. His eyes weren't clear and innocent now. They were still deep, and blue. But the spirit in them was clouded and furtive.

He licked his lips nervously. I wondered if this were a "word" he had learned, or an interstellar sign of nervousness. I knew I was looking at him calmly.

I knew that I would look at him just as calmly when he approached the bed and did what he had come to do. It didn't matter any more that he would succeed. I had felt that he would.

I had had my moment now. I had experienced the joy of motherhood. I had lived a full life. And the past few months had been too much to bear.

(Continued on page 175)

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READER'S PAGE

BEST CAVE STORY YET

Sirs:

I have read your magazine for many years, and to be perfectly frank with you, I have never read a better "cave" story than the one you ran in the July issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. I'm speaking of William P. McGivern's "Goddess of the Golden Flame." It kept me in complete suspense until I reached the last line. Please give us more of McGivern's stories, as he's tops.

I do not doubt but that you have received many requests along the same line as I'm about to ask of you. However, I've often thought how nice it would be if your two magazines, FA and AS would offer to its readers photos of all your regular authors. There would be a great demand for said photos I'm sure. How about it?

Gordon L. Gillmore,
1505 92nd St. S.,
Seattle 8, Wash.

Glad you liked Bill McGivern's story so well. We thought it was tops too. And now that you mention it, it was a darn good "cave" story. And you can rest assured that Bill will be coming back to the pages of FA very frequently. As to the photos of authors, we've run at various times, a "Meet The Author" page, complete with photograph and autobiography. Most of our regular authors have been featured in that department from time to time. But we think you're right—we should do it more often, and we will.....Ed.

ZIFF-DAVIS IS TOPS

Sirs:

I have been one of your fans ever since *Amazing Stories* came out once a month. I enjoy all of your magazines a great deal. FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, of course, is tops. Next is *Amazing Stories. Mammoth Detective* and *Mammoth Mystery* are next, and then *Mammoth Western* and *Mammoth Adventure.*

As soon as I buy one of your magazines I read what the editor has to say about the stories. Next I read the Discussions (and I hope my letter will be there the next time I look) and then I get to the stories.

In July's issue, the cover was excellent, as was the story, "Goddess of the Golden Flame." The next best story was "Toffee Takes A Trip," by Charles Myers. The rest were up to par. The two best stories that I can remember reading were "Mr. Anonymous" and "The Land of the Big Blue Apples." I still can't get used to Mr. Shaver. I guess his yarns are good but I don't go for them very much.

Let's hear more about "Toffee" the dream-girl. And also, what happened to "Toka"?

I only wish that FA would come out monthly, and I'd also like to see those colored drawings on the back covers again. They were really breath-taking and one of the best parts of the whole book. Got to close now. I'll give you a report on the next FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

Peter Data,
312 E. 8th St.,
New York 9, N. Y.

Thanks a lot, Peter, for all the nice things you said about FA and the rest of our magazines. And incidentally, one of your requests is already granted. FA is now monthly as you know. And as to some of the other requests and suggestions: "Toffee" will be back shortly, and Toka will be featured in a new novel very soon. We're also working hard on those swell back cover paintings that you liked so well. So watch for them.....Ed.

TWO SWELL YARNS

Sirs:

Double thanks for two swell yarns. You know the ones I mean. "Goddess of the Golden Flame" by William P. McGivern, and "Secret of the Yomar" by Elroy Arno. McGivern is rather a favorite of mine, and after this I'll watch for Arno too.

The other stories, I'm sorry to say, didn't register with me. "Carrion Crypt" particularly, belongs in a "weird" magazine specializing in horror tales. It was good in its own way, but out of place in FA.

Confidentially, and not wanting to hurt your feelings, but I'm getting awful sick of "Toffee." Do we hafta have her every month?

The features, and of course, the Reader's Page, are up to standard and I know I didn't waste my quarter. This is just one man's opinion—and that one a girl.

Elfie M. Knox,
612 Cate Rd.,
Pico, Cal.

And some very good opinions too, Elfie. We're mighty glad to hear from any reader—that's the only way we find out what you like and dislike. As to "Carrion Crypt," it was an off-trail story, and you must admit that you don't find many in FA with that particular theme. We like to give you readers a taste of all the good fantasy—and you did like the story, even if you felt it was

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slightly out of place. As to "Toffee," we don't plan to feature her every month—we can't get Mr. Myers to write that much! But you're right, we don't want to run her into the ground, so she'll show up from time to time. (Running Toffee into the ground would be quite a task anyway—that little lady has a mind of her own!) And Bill McGivern will be back shortly with a new, and need we say swell, story. Ditto Elroy Arno...Ed.

A BIG IMPROVEMENT

Sirs:

Well, here we go again. I purchased the July issue last night and just finished reading it.

Boy, you sure have improved. The cover was an excellent job. Takes first place this issue. The pics on pages 8 & 9 were second, on 135 third, on 50 fourth, on 87 fifth, and on 166-167 last. The pics on 122-132 were too poor to rate. They had nothing to do with the story.

The stories were all excellent, with "Goddess of the Golden Flame" taking first easily. "Secret of the Yomar" took second place, with "Peter Backs A Punch" a close third. (Sequel wanted for both.) "Toffee Takes A Trip" was fourth, and "Largo" fifth. "Carrion Crypt" is last for the sole reason that it was too short.

I think this issue was a big improvement because the stories in the previous issue weren't so hot. I read three of them and put "Shades of Henry Morgan" first, with "Meet My Mummy" second, and "The Emperor's Eye" third. The rest I haven't even read. Been sort of busy lately getting things in order before I shove off for Uncle Sam's Navy. Well, that's all for now, but how about going monthly soon . . .

Paul Kern,
R.F.D. #3,
Continental, Ohio.

O.K. Paul, we're monthly. And we're glad you think the July issue was a big improvement. All we'll say is, watch the coming issues! And good luck to you in your navy career.....Ed.

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THE SHAVER MYSTERY CLUB

Sirs:

This is to let all the readers of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES who have read Mr. Shaver's stories, and liked them, know that the "Shaver Mystery Club" has been formed from his famous stories in *Amazing Stories*, to try and find out some of the basic truths that Mr. Shaver has intimated exist in his writing. This is no easy task, as the now famous "Shaver Mystery" covers such a wide field. But we have thus far made tremendous progress, and the support and interest of numerous fans interested in the mystery have proven that there *is* truth in Richard Shaver's work.

So if you as a reader of FA are at all interested in the "Shaver Mystery" or in Mr. Shaver's stories in FA, this is a cordial invitation to join our club.

We have no dues, no fancy board of officers. Mr. Shaver has donated his personal time to edit the "Shaver Mystery Magazine" which is the voice of our club, wherein all available evidence, pro and con, pertaining to the mystery is presented. The first issue has been out for some time, and the second will probably be distributed to members by the time you read this letter. Contained in the club magazine, and to be published nowhere else, is Mr. Shaver's sensational, thought-provoking novel, "Mandark," the story of the Life of Christ. This manuscript, over 200,000 words long, could not be published in Amazing Stories, so the club is presenting it to all members because it contains important facts on the entire Shaver Mystery.

The only requirement to join the club is that you subscribe to the club magazine, which is the one medium that makes the club possible. Subscription is $1 for two issues.

Controversial discussions are welcomed, in fact, necessary, because our one aim is to prove or disprove any part or all of the Shaver Mystery. Along these lines, an article by Mr. Shaver in the first issue, in which he explains the William Heirens murder case, has aroused considerable debate.

So I'm asking you, as one of the writers you have been kind enough to read in FA and AS, and a man who is sincerely interested in what Mr. Shaver has to say, to join the club and receive our magazine, and to send in any information you may have pertinent to the mystery. In this way only can we achieve our goal.

May I hear from you?

Chester S. Geier,
The Shaver Mystery Club,
2414 Lawrence Ave.,
Chicago 25, Ill.

Well, there you have it. We'd like to point out that Mr. Geier, who is one of your most popular writers—remember "Forever Is Too Long" and many other fine stories—has done a whale of a job in forming the Shaver Mystery Club. We've seen the first issue of the club magazine, and it is the finest fan magazine we've ever seen. All you Shaver fans are missing a great opportunity if you haven't already joined the club.....Ed.

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LIFE-GUARD OF HEALTH

By J. R. MARKS

SCIENCE has shown that our body is composed of sixteen elements, and our bones, blood, and tissues depend upon a proper bodily balance of these sixteen elements for normal living. One of these essential elements is called organic chlorine. Chlorine is a gaseous element but an essential minimum must be present in all organic life. There are about three-fourths of an ounce of this mineral in the human body which must constantly be replenished. In the human body chlorine is found as a compound in the tissues, and also in the kidneys, liver, and heart. It plays a most important part in processes of metabolism. Chlorine is a remarkable cleanser, purifier and germicide. Chlorine in normal amounts aids the body's digestive processes, and has a toning effect on the whole muscular system. The chlorine foods are essential to maintain the chemical balance of the body. Grass-eating animals travel many miles in search of salt-licks (sodium-chloride), instinctively seeking the chemical cravings of their bodies. As the human body is constantly losing its supply of chlorine, care should be taken to include chlorine foods in the diet. Chlorine is lost through perspiration, and vegetables also take chlorine from the body. Chlorine is found chiefly in sea-food and cheese. Sauerkraut is also an excellent source. Salt fish are natural chemical laboratories where chlorine is changed into necessary mineral form in order to be digested by the body. Inorganic chlorine found in water does not have the value of organic chlorine such as that found in sea-food. Only organic chlorine can enter the cells and tissues through the blood-stream and perform the antiseptic, cleansing, and purifying processes for which this element is necessary.

* * *

HIGH EARS

(Continued from page 172)

I could almost welcome the death that Harvey had brought with him.

I knew he was too intellectual to care for more than the simple FACT of my death. He wouldn't stoop to such a Nazi trick as torture for the pleasure of watching it.

So I looked at him and smiled.

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"How are you, darling?" he asked nervously.

"I feel fine," I said, my voice calm and the smile staying on my lips.

He didn't say anything for a moment. Finally seemed to reach a decision.

He left the sanctuary of the door and walked toward me.

"Do you think you are strong enough to stand a shock?" he asked in apparent concern.

"What are you talking about?" I asked in feigned ignorance of what was coming.

"Are you?" he persisted, coming closer.

"I—think so," I said faintly.

He was standing by the bed now. There was a tense look on his face. Then he was bending over. Slowly.

I closed my eyes. I wanted to cry out. I wanted to scream my heart out. But now it was too late. I couldn't even have whispered.

His lips crushed mine in a kiss. When they left mine they left a tingling feeling. As from a tremendous distance I heard him speak. The words didn't penetrate. But they left a feeling that something was amiss.

"What did you say?" I whispered.

"I said 'That's fine,'" he repeated. "Because I've brought my father to see you and his grandson."

I OPENED my eyes. In the doorway stood the man in the frosted panel, a broad smile on his lips. Behind him, a broad grin splitting his face from ear to ear, stood Dr. Sorenson.

Harvey's voice was explaining. It was telling me that he had recovered his memory right after the operation and remembered that he had to keep his mission secret until he had had time to be SURE that his race would receive

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a friendly welcome. If it wouldn't, he was to steal back into the sky and they would continue their wanderings until they did find a friendly race.

Harvey's words poured forth rapidly. And I knew at last that they were true. They made everything click into place. Those months of study of all phases of history and knowledge; the building of that radio to contact the ship. The patient months of teaching his father, so that he would arrive as a citizen and not an alien.

My father-in-law was entering the room now. I watched him. How erect and stately he looked!

I felt Harvey's hand steal over mine. I squeezed it reassuringly, a smile on my lips.

Harvey's father approached until he stood directly in front of me, looking at me and then at his grandson. Then back at me.

Harvey was still talking. He was telling how the home planet of his race had collided with another planet, and how they had gotten away. Only a few thousand out of all the millions that had been there. And how they had wandered for centuries in search of a new home, until at last they had found the Earth. And how he, Harvey had dropped in a parachute, how it had developed a rip which made him land too swiftly in the trees near Jud's farm, and he had lost consciousness, not to regain his memory until eight years later.

I had it all now. The picture was complete. I could understand how such a race would want to be very sure they were welcome before intruding on a new world. It was so like them.

Harvey's father was beaming at me now. I could almost read his mind. He was going to surprise me!

Well, I would surprise him too!

He cleared his throat nervously and

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looked around at Dr. Sorenson for moral support. Dr. Sorenson nodded his head in encouragement.

I smiled and waited.

He cleared his throat again and then said, "Hello, Edith. In spite of all the word pictures my son painted of his wife, I must say that you far exceed my fondest hopes. And so does my grandson," he added, beaming at him.

Now was the time! NOW was the time. Slowly, conscious that every inflection and tone were phonetically perfect, I said, "Goinyee- ah, puh-hong szoh-ah, te wah, dew-poh. dzee whoo. Kwah-ahh hah-noh pait. twee, loo. oh PA." (You are no more pleased than your daughter, father of Harvey.)

At the first sound of my voice I had felt Harvey's hand slip from mine, startled. I heard his gasp of amazement with inward glee. I was getting even for all the misery my overwrought imagination had dealt me. Harvey wasn't entirely blameless. He COULD have taken his own wife into his confidence!

I forgave him. I had forgiven him the moment I realized what it all meant. And when I saw the look of amazement on my father-in-law's face change to pride in my accomplishment I fell as deeply in love with the dear, lovable old man as I had ever been with Harvey.

And when I finished my little bombshell the silence in the room seemed to include the world. It was broken finally by Harvey's indignant voice.

"The books all warned me you can't keep anything from a woman, but I wouldn't believe them. Yaah! I thought I was smart."

His father looked at him disgustedly. Then he said, distinctly, without even the slightest trace of a foreign accent, "NUTS!"

(THE END)

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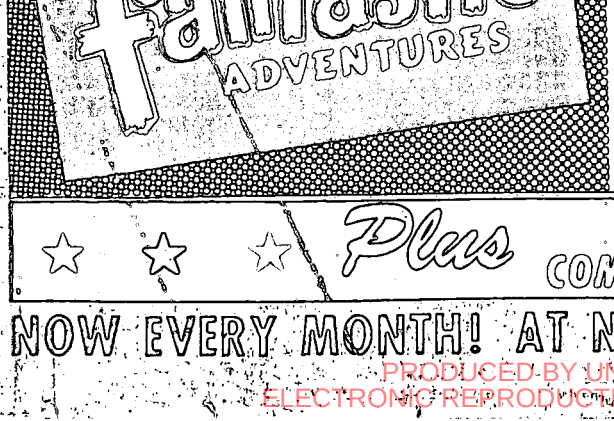

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